CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SACRED PRIESTHOOD

PIOT-REMLER

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ON THE

SACRED PRIESTHOOD

FOR YOUNG PRIESTS AND SEMINARIANS

ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL OF THE

REV. B. S. PIOT

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F. J. REMLER, C.M.

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TO THE

STUDENTS AND ALUMNI

OF

KENRICK SEMINARY

THIS LITTLE VOLUME

IS

RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY

DEDICATED.

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INTRODUCTION

On the idea formed of the Sacred Priesthood depends the manner of exercising it. If we are not convinced of its *Excellence*, we run the risk of dishonoring it by criminal omissions, perhaps by great scandals. If we are not aware of the *Dangers* which attend it, we shall expose ourselves rashly and shall perish. If we have not foreseen the *Difficulties* which accompany it, we shall become discouraged at the first trial. We shall abandon it in the hope of a more easy life or shall fulfill its duties negligently in order to avoid trouble and opposition. If we consider only its dangers and difficulties without reflecting on the numerous *Graces* attached to it, and the *Good* produced by it, we shall become pusillanimous and perhaps refuse to accept the charge of souls when called to it by our superiors. Lastly, if we view the Sacred Priesthood with profane eyes, merely as a post of honor entitling us to live by the altar, it will foster our pride and sensuality; it will render us vain, punctilious and self-interested.

But if we conceive a true idea of the Sacred Priesthood, we shall honor it by an irreproachable and edifying life. If we know its Dangers, we shall,

like Moses, enter upon its functions only by the command of God. The sight of the Difficulties we may meet with, will awaken our vigilance, stimulate our exertions, and cause us to apply ourselves to earnest and persevering prayer. The Graces imparted to us will sustain our courage, and enable us to produce fruits of salvation in the Church. The desire of participating in the spiritual advantages of the ministry will make us undertake everything, endure everything, and overcome every obstacle that the world and Satan may oppose to our designs. Walking in the footsteps of St. Paul we shall see nothing but Jesus Christ; we shall labor for His glory alone, and deem ourselves amply rewarded if we gain souls to His service and love. "I count all things to be but loss, for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3, 8.)

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SACRED PRIESTHOOD

FIRST CONSIDERATION

EXCELLENCE OF THE SACRED PRIESTHOOD

We may judge of the excellence of the Sacred Priesthood, 1. by the dignity of the Person who instituted it; 2. by the dignity of those who have exercised it; 3. by the sublimity of the powers which it confers; and 4. by the end it seeks to attain.

1. *Its Excellence Judged from the Greatness of its Author.*

The surpassing excellence of the Priesthood appears from the greatness of its Author. It is none other than the eternal Son of God Himself who has instituted this august ministry; it is He who invests us with its dignity. He sends us as He Himself was sent by His eternal Father; "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you." (John 20, 21.) "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and have appointed you, that you should go and should bring

forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." (John 15, 16.) Our mission, then, is not from men; it comes from God Himself. "Neither of men, nor by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father." (Gal. 1, 1.) It is the Holy Ghost who has established the pastors of the Church. "Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock, wherein the Holy Ghost hath placed you bishops, to rule the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20, 28.) Although there are in the Church many different functions, they were all instituted by the same Lord: "And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and other some evangelists, and other some pastors and doctors, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edification of the body of Christ." (Ephes. 4, 11.)

It is Christ Himself who addresses His ministers in these words: "Going therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28, 19.) He commands them to change bread and wine into His sacred Body and Blood, to offer the holy sacrifice, and to nourish the faithful with His vivifying flesh. "This is my Body which is given for you; this is my Blood which shall be shed for you; do this in commemoration of me!" (Luke 22, 19.) He honors them with the character

of His ambassadors: "For Christ therefore, we are ambassadors; God, as it were, exhorting by us." (2 Cor. 5, 19.) He entrusts to them the office of reconciling sinners: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained them." (John 20, 23.) O sublime ministry, worthy of all respect . . . How should I fear to dishonor thee! Woe to me, if raised high above the angels by my functions, I grovel on the earth by following the instincts of my animal nature!

We wish to be respected by men as the representatives of Jesus Christ. This is just. St. Paul enjoins it on the faithful: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God." (1 Cor. 4, 1.) But let us not forget if the faithful are bound to honor our ministry, it becomes our duty to act at all times as behooves Christ's representatives. "In all things let us exhibit ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in tribulation, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in prisons, in seditions, in labors, in watchings, in fastings, in chastity, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in sweetness, in the Holy Ghost, in charity unfeigned." (2 Cor. 6, 4.) We must continually see to it that we "give no offense to any man, that our ministry be not blamed." (2 Cor. 6, 3.) In whatever circumstances we may be placed—in prosperity or adversity, in public or in private, at

the altar, in the pulpit, in the confessional,—our sanctity ought to shine forth and oblige the spectators to say: "These are indeed true priests; these are the ministers of Him who is holy."

Nothing provokes the wrath of God so much as the disedifying life of His priests. Hear how He threatens them by the mouth of His prophet: "And now, O ye priests, this commandment is to you: If you will not hear, and if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name,—I will send poverty upon you, and will curse your blessings; yea, I will curse them, because you have not laid it to heart.—You have departed out of the way and have caused many to stumble at the law,—therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, as you have not kept my ways." (Mal. 2; 1–9.)

O Jesus, avert from us such maledictions; purify our lips and our hands, that our prayers and sacrifices may be acceptable in Thy sight! "And He (Christ) shall purify the sons of Levi, and shall refine them as gold and as silver, and they shall offer sacrifices to the Lord in justice, and the sacrifice shall please the Lord." (Mal. 3, 3.)

2. *Its Excellence Judged from the Dignity of the Persons who have Discharged it.*

In the second place the excellence of the Sacred Priesthood is manifest from the consideration of the

dignity of the persons who have discharged it. Christ Jesus, the only begotten Son of the Most High God, has Himself been the first one to exercise the functions of the Christian Priesthood. He was sent for this purpose by His Father: "He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the contrite of heart." (Luke 4, 18.) He was seen going through the cities and villages to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation: "He travelled through the cities and towns preaching and evangelizing the kingdom of God." (Luke 8, 1.)

After the example of the Savior, and by His orders, the Apostles went through every part of Judea, and afterwards to the extremities of the world, to announce the word of God and baptize all nations. They were constantly occupied with the duties of the Sacred Ministry, as the history of their Acts abundantly proves.

All holy bishops and a vast multitude of priests honored by the Church for their sanctity, have devoted themselves unreservedly to these same functions. They labored for one end only, namely, to make Jesus Christ known and loved, to gain Him worshippers, to "form Him" in their hearts. Every one of them could say with St. Paul: "In this also I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice, that by all means—Christ be preached." (Philip. 1, 18.) Their zeal for the fulfillment of their high mission was so ardent, that

no obstacle could arrest it. The persecutions to which they were subjected, the torments which they had to endure, served only to render them more fervent, more firm, more intrepid. "But I fear none of these things, neither do I count my life more precious than myself, so that I may consummate my course and the ministry of the word which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20, 24.)

Since then we are co-laborers with Jesus Christ, and the successors of the Saints in the work of the ministry, let us endeavor to be always pleasing to God: "Carefully study to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2, 15.) We have before us models without number. Let us then, like them, put away every obstacle to the exercise of our holy functions; let us free ourselves from worldly occupations and diversions; from useless visits; from sin and the occasions which lead to it; and hasten to fight the battles of the Lord, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author of our faith and ministry; on the Apostles who have founded the Church; on the great bishops who have governed it and the evangelical laborers who have sanctified it: "And therefore, we also, having so great a cloud of witnesses over our head, laying aside every weight (obstacle) and sin which surrounds us, let us run by

patience to the fight proposed to us, looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, who, having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12, 1.) Let us vindicate the truths of faith, like St. Augustine; preach the word of God with dignity, like St. John Chrysostom; reform abuses, like St. Charles. Let us attract the people to virtue and piety by mildness and affability, like St. Francis de Sales; and provide for all the corporal and spiritual wants of men, like St. Vincent de Paul.

A clergyman desirous of honoring his priesthood and of complying faithfully with all its obligations, will frequently consider these great models. He will strive to imbibe their spirit by studying their lives, and soon will be in a manner perfect, capable of performing all kinds of good works: "That the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work." (2 Tim. 3, 17.) "The lives of the Saints," said St. Francis de Sales, "are the Gospel reduced to practice." It is especially the examples left us by the holy men of our profession, that we ought to study. Nothing can be more instructive, more edifying, more encouraging, than to peruse the biographies of those who have illustrated the Church, particularly in these latter times, as St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis de Sales, St. Francis Xavier, St. Francis Regis, St. Vincent de Paul, St. John Vianney, and others.

The life of St. Vincent is perhaps best calculated to form a holy pastor. Placed by Providence in the various situations in which a priest may find himself, he fulfilled his office with so much meekness, humility, prudence, disinterestedness, edification and usefulness, that we have only to copy his example in order to become good priests. In his parishes of Clichy and Chatillon, in his missions, at the head of his community and seminaries, at the court, in the galleys, in the hospitals, in the pious assemblies, at the altar, in the pulpit, in the confessional, at table, in conversation, with the sick, in the houses of the great —everywhere and at all times we find him to be an exemplary priest, a zealous pastor, a tender father, a charitable friend; always occupied with the interests of his God, always mindful of the necessities of his neighbor, always guided by pure intentions; looking on himself as a great sinner, humbling himself before all, admiring the goodness of God who bears with him and uses so vile an instrument; extending his solicitude to all, to clergymen and to seculars, to the indigent and to the wealthy, to those in health and to those deprived of reason; to mendicants, to foundlings, to abandoned women, to prisoners, to galley slaves, to foreigners, to those beyond the seas, to schismatics and idolaters as well as to those of the household of the faith. In a word, like the sun which illuminates both hemispheres and vivifies all nature,

St. Vincent de Paul made all climes and all classes of society feel the salutary influence of his ardent charity and apostolic zeal.

St. Francis de Sales observes that as bees take from different flowers the substance with which they make honey and wax, so will a pastor who aims at perfection, select from his spiritual reading, maxims for practice and examples for imitation. He will likewise observe in some of his clerical brethren various virtues that are worthy of his imitation. With such men, who are the good odor of Christ in the world, he must seek to form a close friendship. In their company he will find edification and encouragement in his laudable designs, and will profit by their knowledge and counsels: "He that walketh with the wise, shall be wise." (Prov. 13, 20.)

3. *Its Excellence Judged by the Powers with which Priests are Invested.*

The powers with which priests are invested also show the excellence of their office. These powers are numerous, great and divine. We are the plenipotentiaries of the Most High, His confidants, His cooperators in the saving of souls. "For we are God's coadjutors." (1 Cor. 3, 9.) He has placed in our hands the treasures of His graces to dispense them to men. He has given to us the keys of heaven to open and to shut it. He has bound Himself to ratify

in heaven what we shall have done on earth in His name. He has given to us the power to announce His word, to multiply His children by Baptism, to nourish them with His life-giving flesh, after having consecrated and offered it in sacrifice. He authorizes us to remit sins in the Sacrament of Penance; to comfort and strengthen the sick by Extreme Unction; to bless the matrimonial union of Christians; and He empowers bishops to perpetuate the sacred hierarchy by Ordination. We are mediators between God and His people; we present to God the petitions of the faithful; we intercede for them. From the hands of a worthy priest flow graces and blessings in abundance; all feel his influence. "There is no one that can hide himself from his heat." (Ps. 18, 7.)

The arrival of such a pastor in a congregation is a signal favor of heaven; it is a boon which the people can not sufficiently value. O my God! Thy Spirit alone can form such pastors. Send Him to Thy ministers, and they will renew piety among Thy people: "Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth." (Ps. 103, 30.)

Many are the reflections which present themselves here. Our powers are highly useful, nay, absolutely necessary to the Church. They are talents of which we must one day give an account; let us not bury

them, if we wish to avoid the punishment of the slothful servant: "The unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 25, 30.) Our powers are divine; let us not abuse them and betray the interests of Him who has given them to us. It would be a sacrilege to make them the instruments of our passions, or a means to increase our earthly goods, to obtain worldly preferment, to promote our own glory.

We co-operate with Christ in everything that relates to the salvation of souls; let us therefore devote ourselves entirely to this great work and imitate the patient endurance and heroic courage of good soldiers: "Labor as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (2 Tit. 2, 3.)

We have in our keeping the treasures of divine grace; let us dispense them with fidelity, by courageously refusing the Sacraments to those who are unworthy, and promptly and cheerfully administering them to all who are properly disposed. "Here now it is required among the dispensers (of the mysteries of God) that a man be found faithful." (1 Cor. 4, 2.) The keys of heaven are in our hands; to us is entrusted the power of remitting or retaining sins in the tribunal of penance; let us be careful to loose and bind according to the principles sanctioned by the Church, since the imprudent use of our powers would

involve us in great guilt, for in binding and loosing inconsiderately we would bind ourselves.

One of the most important functions, nay, *the* most important function, of the priestly state is the preaching of the word of God. "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations—teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28, 18.) To every one of us God addresses these words: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word from my mouth, and shalt tell it to them from me." (Ezech. 33, 7.) Let us then instruct the people on all occasions: in sermons, instructions, explanations of the Catechism and of the Liturgy of the Church, in addresses to sodalities and societies, by exhortations in the confessional and at the sickbed, in private conversations, by distributing instructive reading matter, and in many other ways that a genuine and enlightened piety and zeal for souls will suggest.

Let us therefore make it a duty to instruct the people whenever an opportunity presents itself, for woe is to us if we hold the truth captive! It is as plainly our strict obligation to feed the flock committed to us with the word of God, as it is the duty of a father to provide his family with the means of livlihood. "If I preach the Gospel, it is no glory to me; for a necessity lieth upon me. For woe is to me if I preach not the Gospel." (1 Cor. 9, 16.) But

to acquit ourselves of this duty in a worthy manner, we should announce the truth of God in all its purity, without any admixture of human sentiments: "We are not, as many, adulterating the word of God; but with sincerity, but as from God, in Christ we speak." (2 Cor. 2, 17.) "We preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ, our Lord." (2 Cor. 4, 5.)

We must strive to acquire a practical conviction that preaching is the great means instituted by Divine Wisdom for the conversion and sanctification of men. "It pleased God, by the foolishness of our preaching to save them that believe." (1 Cor. 1, 21.) The eternal lot of thousands will be decided by the manner in which we fulfill this all-important duty. If we are zealous, multitudes will rise up and call us blessed, and their glory in heaven will redound to our own greater happiness; but if we are slothful, the voices of those who are lost will eternally rise to heaven to call down God's vengeance on us who have become the cause of their condemnation. "If, when I say to the wicked: Thou shalt surely die; and thou declare it not to him, that he may be converted from his wicked way and live; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but I will require his blood at thy hand." (Ezech. 3, 18.)

O Jesus, fill my soul with Thy Spirit, inflame my heart with Thy love, enlighten my mind and give me understanding, that I may worthily speak of Thee

and of Thy Gospel! Bless my instructions, and give unction to my words, that they may become profitable to those who will hear them. Make me also profit by them, and practice what I shall teach to others.

Christ has appointed us as the pastors of His flock; of that flock which He purchased and acquired at the price of His most Precious Blood. Hence let us strive to feed it in the manner prescribed by St. Peter, to whom it was first committed by our Savior in person: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking care of it, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre's sake, but voluntarily." (1. Pet. 5, 2.) We should walk at the head of our flock, and exhibit in our own person the virtues which we recommend to them. They will follow us and be safe from the attacks of the wolves. "And when the good shepherd hath led out his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice." (John 10, 4.) Let us imitate the great Pastor of us all: He gave His life for His sheep. Let us consecrate to the souls entrusted to us our fatigues, our vigils, our earthly goods, and if it be necessary, our own life: "The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep." (John 10, 11.) We must never flee like the hireling, who, satisfied with the fleece and meat and milk of the flock, neglects to defend it against the attacks of ferocious beasts of prey; but on the contrary, we should do our utmost

to prevent or to arrest the scandals which would cause the ruin of souls so dear to Christ. He is a hireling indeed, who, when he sees the wolf rushing upon a defenseless flock, runs away heedless of the fate of the sheep.

We are by profession mediators between God and the people. Happy shall we be, if our heart is so pure, so united with God by charity and a holy friendship that our mediation is always acceptable to Him and beneficial to our neighbor. "We would not venture to intercede," says St. Gregory, "with one who is not bound to us by the ties of friendship, much less with an enemy; how, then can we dare appear before God to intercede with Him in behalf of sinners, if we ourselves have insulted and offended Him and are alienated from Him by grievous sin?" Must not God complain of sinful priests as He complained of the priests of the Old Law: "I sought among them for a man that might set up a hedge, and stand in the gap before me in favor of the land, that I might not destroy it; and I found none." (Ezech. 22, 30.)

But the power most worthy of our respect is that of consecrating the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, of nourishing ourselves with it, and of distributing it to the faithful. Incomprehensible power! God obeys man. We utter the sacred words, and He renders Himself present on our altars. Truly marvellous and worthy of all honor is the dignity of priests

in whose hands, as in the womb of the ever blessed Virgin Mary, the Eternal Son of God becomes Man again! If our hands were as pure as those of Mary and Joseph, which carried Jesus so often; if our hearts were as spotless as the womb of Mary, in which He reposed for the space of nine months; if our lips had been cleansed, like those of the prophet—even then we should be filled with awe in offering the sacrifice of the New Law.

St. Bernard, in order to impress sentiments of profound respect on the minds of the Fathers who composed the Council of Reims, said to them: "How exalted is the dignity which God has conferred on you! How great is the prerogative of your order! God has exalted you above kings and emperors; He has elevated your rank above all other ranks; He has raised you even above the Angels and Archangels, above the Thrones and Dominations. For, as He did not take hold of angels, but of the seed of Abraham in order to accomplish the redemption, so also has He committed the office of consecrating the Body and Blood of the Lord, not to angels, but to men, and among these to priests only."

No; not to angels, not even to the most exalted of them, the Cherubim and Seraphim, is granted the honor of being invested with the sacred character of the priesthood. They are deeply penetrated with reverential awe when they are present at the offering

of the holy sacrifice; but they are not privileged to be the offerers as are the priests of the New Law. Should not we, like them, be seized with religious awe whenever we approach the altar? Woe to us, if precipitation, a dissipated air, and a cold heart accompany us thither; or worse still, if we enter the holy of holies with criminal affections, with a polluted heart, with our hands, eyes or tongue impure! O my God, purify the lips that have to pronounce the sacred words of consecration and that are daily purpled with the blood of the Immaculate Lamb; purify the hands that touch so often the virginal body of Thy Son; cleanse my heart in which He desires to take up His abode; and my eyes which behold Him from so near.

The pious author of the "Following of Christ" has written some very instructive reflections on this subject, which we should often recall in pious meditation. "Lo, thou art made a priest, and art consecrated to say Mass.—Thou hast not lightened thy burden, but art now bound with a stricter bond of discipline, and art obliged to a greater perfection of sanctity. A priest ought to be adorned with all virtues, and to give example of a good life to others. His conversation should not be with the vulgar and common ways of men, but with the angels in heaven, or with perfect men upon earth." (Imit. IV, 5.)

In another place he writes: "Oh, how great and

honorable is the office of priests, to whom it is given to consecrate with sacred words the Lord of Majesty, to bless Him with their lips, to hold Him in their hands, to receive Him with their own mouth, and to administer Him to others! Oh! how clean ought those hands to be, how pure that mouth, how holy that body, how unspotted the heart of a priest into whom the Author of purity so often enters! Nothing but what is holy, no word but that which is good and profitable, ought to proceed from the mouth of a priest, who so often receives the Sacrament of Christ. His eyes ought to be simple and chaste, which are used to behold the body of Christ; his hands pure and lifted up to heaven, which are used to handle the Creator of heaven and earth! (Imit. IV, 2.)

After these considerations we may well repeat the words of the Prophet: "O Lord, I have heard Thy hearing and was afraid." (Hab. 3, 1.) I admire, O my God, Thy goodness which has entrusted to me powers so sublime; but I fear lest I should exercise them in a manner that will be displeasing to Thee. May I never act but by the impression of Thy Spirit, as an instrument moved by the hand which uses it. From Thee I have received the dignity; from Thee I expect to receive the strength to sustain its weight. He who is the Author of my office, will be my helper in its proper administration; and He who has con-

ferred on me this dignity will aid me lest I succumb to the magnitude of the favor." (St. Leo, Sermon 2.)

4. *Its Excellence Judged from its End and Purpose.*

A fourth proof of the excellence of the Sacred Priesthood is derived from the consideration of its end. This end is the glory of God, and the eternal salvation of men. To make God known, loved and served; to produce Him adorers; to sanctify souls; to destroy the reign of sin; to establish the empire of virtue; to people heaven with the children of men—such are the end and purpose of our functions. "Lo, I have set thee this day over nations and over kingdoms, to root up and to pull down, and to waste and to destroy, and to build and to plant." (Jer. 1, 10.) No other object is or can be more excellent. To speak worthily of it one should possess a perfect knowledge of God and of the value of human souls. Oh! had we a lively faith, we should deem ourselves too much honored to be permitted to labor for the glory of the Sovereign of the universe. "Holy Father, the world knows Thee not" was the complaint of the Savior on the eve of His Passion. Alas, some of Thy ministers know Thee not. If they did know Thee they would despise none of the functions that honor Thee. They would allow none of the souls Thou lovest to perish eternally. They would not see the disorders which

outrage Thy holy name, and yet remain unconcerned and undisturbed. If they knew Thee, they would mourn over the scandals they witness. They would make use of exhortation, of correction, of prayer, of penance, to bring back those who have abandoned Thee; and if they failed in their efforts, they would at least deeply and constantly lament the transgression of Thy law, the abuse of Thy graces, and the ruin of souls.

Resolutions.

Urged by these reflections on the excellence of the sacred priesthood, we will take the following resolutions:

1. To reflect frequently on the eminent dignity of the sacerdotal character, in order always to entertain a high idea of it, and do nothing which might throw the least discredit on it.

2. To have an equal esteem for all sacred functions, even those which ecclesiastics destitute of the spirit of God deem beneath their dignity.

3. Never to discharge our pastoral duties through mere custom or routine, in a hasty manner, with levity and a wilfully distracted mind; but always with exactness, recollection and modesty, in the presence of God and in the name of Christ.

4. To recollect ourselves before commencing our

functions; to purify our conscience by an act of contrition; to unite ourselves with Christ, the High Priest of the New Law, and with a deep sense of our unworthiness, to call upon Him to assist us. During our ministrations we will renew the intention and the pious sentiments with which we began them. After they are ended, we will examine whether we committed any error. If we did, we will humble ourselves before God and ask His pardon. We will endeavor to repair our faults and avoid them in the future. We will conjure our Savior, to perfect by His grace what He has begun through our ministry and to remedy the defects caused by our ignorance. Finally, we will refer to God alone the glory derived from our success. "God gave the increase; therefore neither he that planteth, is anything, nor he that watereth; but God, that giveth the increase." (1 Cor. 3, 6.)

5. To pray daily for those who are the object of our labors. The prayers of good priests do much for the conversion of sinners. St. Paul ceased not to intercede for the people whom he evangelized. "I cease not to give thanks for you, making commemoration of you in my prayers." When we shall have moved the heart of God by fervent prayers, by penance and mortification, there is no blessing we may not expect for all the members of our flock, even for

those who, till then, have turned a deaf ear to our remonstrances and exhortations. By adhering faithfully to these resolutions we shall show our appreciation of our pastoral office and shed a new lustre on the Church of Christ.

SECOND CONSIDERATION

DANGERS OF THE SACRED PRIESTHOOD

ORDINARILY people regard the ecclesiastical state as a pious and quiet profession, in which little is to be feared for one's salvation. It frequently happens also that the young men who aspire to it entertain the same erroneous notion. Nay, even priests are found who believe themselves secure, simply because they are occupied with holy things in the house of God.

But the Saints thought otherwise. St. Augustine said that nothing was more dangerous than the office of a bishop, of a priest, or of a deacon: "There is nothing in this life, and especially in this age, more difficult, more laborious, and more dangerous than the office of a bishop, or of a priest, or of a deacon." (Letter 21.) St. John Chrysostom fled when he heard of his having been chosen bishop. St. Basil considered the episcopate as calculated to fill one with much apprehension. St. Ambrose tried every means, and very extraordinary ones, to avoid the pastoral charge. St. Gregory the Great hid himself for the same reason, and yielded only when God,

by a miracle, made known the place of his concealment. St. Francis de Sales wept and fell sick when he learned that his bishop had chosen him for his coadjutor. Bartholomew of the Martyrs, who distinguished himself so much in the Council of Trent, would not accept the archbishopric of Braga, until Lewis of Granada, his provincial, commanded him to take it, under pain of excommunication. It is well known how Clement XI refused for several days to accept the Sovereign Pontificate. St. Francis of Assisi refused to be ordained priest and remained in deacon's orders all his life, because God had shown him in vision how pure ought to be the soul of one who offers up the adorable Sacrifice of the Altar.

How different from our sentiments are the sentiments of the Saints! They fear, they shun, they try to evade that which we desire, and covet, and boldly seek to obtain. The reason for this is that we consider only the honors and advantages of our profession, while the Saints viewed only its extensive obligations and manifold dangers.

Of these dangers we shall proceed to treat at some length, not to deter from entering the sacred ministry those who are called to it by God, but to put them on their guard and inspire them with humility. "With fear and trembling work out your salvation." (Philip. 2, 12.) In this we shall but imitate the example of our Lord who also took great pains to

warn His Apostles of the dangers to which they were exposed by reason of their own frailty, the envy of the devil and the malice of men. "Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat." (Luke 22, 31.) "But beware of men." (Matt. 10, 17.) "Take heed and beware of covetousness." (Luke 12, 15.) "I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven." (Luke 10, 18.)

The First Danger: Pride and Ambition.

The first great danger that threatens the salvation of the priest in a very special manner arises from pride and ambition. The very functions of a priest, particularly those which draw the eye of the public on him, expose him to the temptation of seeking the esteem of men, of becoming popular, and of being preferred to his colleagues; hence he performs his office through human and vicious motives. "Some indeed, even out of envy and contention, preach Christ.—And some out of contention preach Christ, not sincerely, supposing that they raise affliction to my bands." (Philip. 1; 15, 17.)

If a priest does not keep a close watch over his heart, if he is not well grounded in humility, he will find in his functions a perpetual occasion of vanity and self-complacency. If he meets with success, he congratulates himself as if he were the author of it. He speaks on all occasions of his labors; he receives

with great satisfaction the praises addressed to him. If on the contrary, he does not succeed according to his expectations, he feels mortified and gives way to discouragement; and if the coveted praise is not forthcoming he is filled with bitter thoughts against those from whom he had hoped to hear words of flattery and commendation. Fatal pride! How many priests have lost through thee the fruit of their ministration!

Ambition and self-conceit lead us to desire an honorable position in cities, where our talents may be displayed to greater advantage, and acquire for us a name. If we are sent to an obscure parish in the country, where we shall not find anything to gratify our vanity, although we could accomplish more for the service of the Church, we murmur and complain of our superiors instead of thanking God for removing far from us the many occasions of sin, which would surround us in a more conspicuous station. To resist this temptation more effectually, we ought to remember that our Lord fled when the people wished to make Him king, and that He rebuked the sons of Zebedee who asked Him for the first places in His kingdom: "You know not what you ask; can you drink the chalice which I am about to drink?" (Matt. 20, 22.)

Our Lord, fully aware of the temptations to vanity and ambition to which His priests would at all

times be exposed, took great pains to impart to His apostles and disciples practical lessons of humility. Such a lesson He taught them after His transfiguration. "After they were come into the house, Jesus asked His disciples: 'What did you treat of in the way?' But they held their peace; for in the way they had disputed among themselves which of them should be the greatest. And sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them: 'If any man desire to be first, he shall be the last of all, and the minister of all.' " (Mark 9, 32.)

On one occasion this itch for promotion prompted them to put the direct question to their divine Master: "Who, thinkest Thou, is the greater in the kingdom of heaven?" And what was the answer they received? Jesus called to Himself a little child, set him in the midst of His disciples and then said to them: "Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven."

And as if to remind us that at no period in our life are we free from the danger of pride and ambition we are informed that even during the solemnity of the Last Supper the Apostles were disputing among themselves about the positions of honor to which they expected to be elevated. "There was also a strife

among them which of them should seem to be the greater. And Jesus said to them: 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and they that have power over them are called beneficent. But you not so. But he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is the leader as he that serveth. For who is the greater: he that sitteth at table, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at table? But I am in the midst of you as he that serveth.'" (Luke 22, 24.)

And finally, to teach His disciples and through them all of His priests, how necessary it is for them to reject all thoughts of pride and ambition, and to cultivate in their place sentiments of profound humility, our Lord illustrated His words by His own example. At the Last Supper He stooped so low as to wash the feet of His disciples, even those of the traitor Judas. "And when supper was done, Jesus riseth from supper, and layeth aside His garments, and having taken a towel, girdeth Himself. And after that He putteth water into a basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.—Then after He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, being set down again, He said to them: 'Know you what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord; and you say well; for so I am. If I then, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet;

you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also.'" (John 13.)

The Second Danger: Avarice or Love of Money.

The second danger which threatens us is avarice. St. Paul regards disinterestedness as a qualification necessary for a priest. He forbids Titus to ordain a self-interested man. "A bishop—must not be greedy of filthy lucre." (Tit. 1, 7.) A priest who loves money is useless for the work of God. Had he no other defect, his avarice alone is an obstacle to his doing good to his congregation. His parsimony renders him contemptible. His harshness towards those to whom he should be a father, makes him odious. Yet, if one is not on his guard, the exercise of parochial duties is apt to beget the spirit of avarice.

Some prefer one situation to another, not on account of the good to be effected, not because of the opportunities it offers of cultivating the ecclesiastical spirit, but merely for the sake of a larger salary. The first question put by such priests with regard to a vacant parish is: "What is the income?" The thought of the emolument attached to their functions accompanies them everywhere, even while they are celebrating the holy mysteries.

They hoard up treasures, without reflecting, that by imitating Judas, the first priest who incurred per-

dition through love of money, they prepare for themselves the same fate. They perhaps will leave these treasures of iniquity to relatives who will dissipate them, or spend them in lawsuits to contest the validity of the will. Oh! let us meditate on these words of the Holy Ghost which seem to be addressed to a pastor of this character: "Considering, I have also found another vanity under the sun: there is but one, and he hath not a second, no child, no brother, and yet he ceaseth not to labor, neither are his eyes satisfied with riches; neither doth he reflect, saying: For whom do I labor and defraud my soul of good things? In this also is vanity and grievous vexation." (Ecclus. 4, 8.)

Unfortunately, avarice, though so fatal in its effects, is less feared than other vices. We yield to its suggestions almost imperceptibly and endeavor to justify ourselves by calling economy and a prudent foresight that which is regarded by others as undue attachment and cupidity. Often the clergymen who have this defect are most exemplary in other respects. They are not subject to intemperance, anger or pride. They fulfill their pastoral duties with a certain regularity and exactness. The demon of avarice will not hinder them from praying and fasting, will let them be zealous in preaching and hearing confessions; but he will hold them captive under the tyranny of the passion we speak of. This is a snare laid most in-

sidiously for the ministers of the altar. Remonstrate with them, and they will seek to justify themselves by alleging that they commit no injustice in demanding what is their due. They overlook the fact that covetousness may exist without any breach of justice. Inordinate attachment to our temporal goods is alone sufficient to render us guilty. Our aim should be to walk in the footsteps of apostolic men, who were all remarkable for disinterestedness, detachment from earthly goods and love of poverty. Would to God that we could all say with the Apostle of the Gentiles: "I have not coveted any man's silver, or gold, or apparel, as you yourselves know; for such things as were needful for me and them that are with me, these (my) hands have furnished. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring you ought to support the weak, and to remember the word of the Lord Jesus, how He said: 'It is a more blessed thing to give rather than to receive.'" (Acts 20, 23.)

St. Charles, that great model of pastors in recent times, points out in a few words the evils caused in an ecclesiastic by the vice of avarice. "Avarice," he says, "defiles everything with which it comes in contact. It vitiates the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the service of the choir, and funerals, when these are performed for the sake of money. How many priests are there, who are in other respects good, modest, upright, studious and exemplary; but this cursed avarice

and grasping disposition renders them hateful to God and to the people and takes away all confidence in their lives and in their sermons! Oh! if churches and altars had tongues and could speak, how many accusations and complaints we would hear!"

To these considerations we can do no better than add a number of instructions which none other than our blessed Lord Himself delivered to His apostles on this matter. The particular instructions which He gave to them, while they apply to all who desire to be His followers, apply in a very special manner to priests. Thus He tells us with great emphasis that there can be no such a thing as a twofold or divided service; it will be either God or mammon that will receive the priest's whole attention and devotion. "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will sustain the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt. 6, 24.)

In order to inculcate on the one hand a love for the opposite virtue and for contentment with little, and to deter us on the other from attaching our hearts to the goods of earth, our Lord pronounces a blessing on poverty, and utters a curse on covetousness. "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. But woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation. Woe to you that are filled, for you shall hunger." (Luke 6, 24.)

Again He says: "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness, for a man's life doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." And He spoke a similitude to them, saying: "The land of a certain man brought forth plenty of fruits. And he thought within himself: What shall I do, because I have no room where to store my fruits? And he said: This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and into them I will gather all things that are grown to me, and my goods. And I will say to my soul: Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, and make good cheer! But God said to him: Thou fool! this very night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So also is he (a fool) that layeth up treasure to himself, and is not rich towards God." (Luke 12, 15.)

As a confirmation of the truth expressed by Ecclesiasticus, (10, 9), that "nothing is more wicked than a covetous man, and that there is not a more wicked thing than to love money; for such a one setteth even his own soul to sale," we have the sad example of the traitor Judas. "And Satan entered into one of the twelve, Judas who is surnamed Iscariot. And he went and discoursed with the chief priests and the magistrates how he might betray Jesus to them. And he said to them: 'What will you

give me, and I will deliver Him to you?' And they were glad and covenanted to give him money; and they appointed him thirty pieces of silver. And from henceforth he sought an opportunity to betray Jesus in the absence of the people.—And he that betrayed Jesus had given them a sign, saying: 'Whomsoever I shall kiss that is He; lay hold on Him, and lead Him away carefully. And when he was come, immediately going up to Him, he said: 'Hail, Rabbi!' and he kissed Him." (Matt. 26; Mark 14.) To this heinous sin Judas added the sin of final despair, which made him end his own life by hanging himself with a halter. What an instructive lesson for priests! Here we have no less a personage than a chosen apostle of Christ, a man who for the space of three years had been a witness to the doctrines and miracles of his Master, and probably performed miracles himself, so brought under the tyrannical power of avarice and covetousness as not to hesitate for thirty miserable pieces of silver to deliver the Eternal Son of God into the hands of His enemies.

No wonder, then, that our Lord is so insistent that His Apostles and all His priests should practice detachment from the goods of this life. "Do not possess gold, nor silver, nor money, in your purses, nor scrip for your journey; nor bread, nor two coats, nor shoes, but to be shod with sandals, nor a staff; for the workman is worthy his hire." (Matt. 10, 9; Mark

6, 8.) And to emphasize still more the danger of riches on the one hand, and the necessity of detachment on the other, He said to His disciples, after the rich young man had turned down the invitation to the more perfect life: "How hardly shall they that have riches, enter into the kingdom of God!" And His disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus, again answering, said to them: "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God!" (Matt. 18, 23.)

With these lessons and instructions on the evil of the love of money before us, we surely can not remain any longer in doubt as to what course to pursue in order to guard against succumbing to the temptations of avarice and covetousness by which every minister of the altar will sooner or later be assailed. Let us strive to imitate St. Paul, who considered all earthly possessions as so much filth and dirt, and gladly sacrificed all that he might gain Christ. "I count all things to be but loss, for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things." (Philip. 3, 8.)

The Third Danger: Impurity and Unchastity.

The third danger to which we are exposed is that of losing the precious virtue of chastity, or at least

of tarnishing its brightness and lustre. There are many forms of this danger, of which the principal ones are the following.

In the first place there are the dangers arising in connection with the hearing of confessions. To hear for hours together, and sometimes for entire days, the accusations of transgressions of the commandments, and yet to preserve one's heart as pure as is demanded by the sanctity of the priestly state, requires solid virtue indeed. The confessor, then, to prevent the confessional from becoming to him a stumbling-block, must entertain a very high esteem for chastity, and have the greatest abhorrence for the opposite vice. He must realize the dangers which surround and threaten him on every side, and he must unceasingly keep a strict watch over his heart and all his senses, lest he be betrayed into sins against the angelic virtue. He must be humble and mortified, full of self-diffidence, ever mindful that even though he may have preserved his baptismal innocence untarnished up to the present, and be as pure as an angel in the sight of God, his past victories and triumphs over temptation are no guarantee that he is invulnerable and proof against the fierce onslaughts of the passion of lust. He must be an interior man and always walk in the presence of God. He must earnestly implore the divine assistance whenever he betakes himself to the

confessional, so that the hearing of the frailties of his penitents may not prove for him a stumbling-block and a rock of scandal against which his virtue will be dashed to pieces.

In the second place, his purity is exposed to great danger in his dealings with persons of the other sex. Frequent conversations with them, even on pious subjects, or on their interior trials, ought to be avoided. When these topics must be treated, the proper place for that is the confessional. This is the advice given by St. Thomas, St. Ignatius, and St. Francis de Sales. And St. Bonaventure, quoting the Fathers, tells priests: "Let us follow the advice of St. Jerome, who says that we must show our regard for women by our esteem for them, not by our frequent conversations with them." St. Augustine gives us the advice to let our conversations with women be brief and limited to what is necessary.

In this connection it must be noted that the telephone has its special dangers for many a priest who is thoughtless and not well balanced in his attitude towards persons of the other sex, especially young ones. They will call him up at any hour, and engage in conversations which are trivial for the most part, and often very silly and foolish. This causes the loss of much valuable time, besides helping to foster and develop dangerous attachments, for such useless

calls, especially when they occur with regular frequency, are usually prompted by an infatuation which young women easily foster for a priest.

The automobile, too, provides new dangers for the priest's chastity in these modern times, inasmuch as it offers so many facilities to drive about in the company of women. Who that knows anything about the weakness of human nature is not aware that such a diversion is very apt to be the occasion of violent temptations, if not of actual sins. But even apart from this, we must ever bear in mind that malicious minds are only too ready to put an evil interpretation on such conduct. A priest's chastity must ever be above all suspicion. Many things may be lawful and innocent in themselves, but they do not edify—they disedify, they create suspicion. The world is lynx-eyed when there is question of discovering faults against this virtue in a minister of God; and there is a general persuasion among those outside the Church that the faithful observance of the vow of chastity is simply an impossible thing, and that those who profess to lead the celibate life are merely leading a life of hypocrisy and deception. Hence a priest's unguarded freedom in associating with women, especially with younger ones, only tends to confirm their suspicion and helps to bring the sacerdotal state itself into contempt.

In the third place a continuous and ever-present

danger to the priest's chastity is found in his own house. It is the presence of female domestics, particularly if these are young and attractive, and not "of an advanced age, modest, prudent, and of a blameless life ascertained by experience," as some diocesan regulations very wisely prescribe. To be under the necessity of seeing these persons day after day, and many times a day, to speak with them, to have them serve you at table and perform various other duties for you, and yet never to feel the troublesome temptations which spring from a man's inborn attraction for persons of the other sex, would mean that you are either confirmed in grace, or that you are as devoid of human passions and inclinations as is a column of stone or a pillar of brass.

The painful truth, however, is this: As long as we carry about with us what St. Paul calls "the body of this death," we are continually assailed by a multitude of temptations which are directly caused by the presence and sight of women. This being the case, what is required of us that we may not be vanquished in this life-long struggle? We must learn to be severe with ourselves. We must use the measures of precaution recommended to us by the saints of God. Like them we must employ a holy violence against ourselves, and resolutely keep down those inclinations and cravings towards dangerous familiarities which begin almost without our knowing it, and

slowly grow without our being aware of it, until it is perhaps too late and those seemingly harmless familiarities have developed into a mighty passion which hurries its victim headlong to endless perdition. It is well for us to remember the popular saying that when the devil has failed by other means he makes use of a woman. We will never regret having taken too many precautions; but we may have to regret not having taken enough. Hence it becomes a matter of necessity to avoid all those things which tend to promote such familiarities. Such are, according to St. Jerome and St. Bonaventure, "frequent presents of ornaments in dress, of things tasty to the palate, letters teeming with affectionate phrases, tender looks, terms of endearment in conversation." These tokens of affections, be they in the form of gifts or of flattery, may very easily become the cause of sinful attachments. Yet there are those priests who will not see any danger in them. This only confirms what St. Cyprian says: Human stubbornness is always so hard of belief, that not only to hear of a fall, but even to see it with our own eyes, does not convince us that where others have perished we too are in danger of losing our virtue."

Chastity is the most beautiful flower in the crown of God's minister; but this flower is so tender and delicate, that a breath is sufficient to tarnish it, while prolonged exposure is sure to kill and destroy it.

It is a precious treasure which we carry in a frail and fragile vessel which the least shock is apt to break. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency may be of the power of God and not of us." (2 Cor. 4, 7.)

As long as a priest is irreproachable on this point, he enjoys the confidence of the faithful; but if he gives occasion to the least suspicion, he is judged guilty, loses his good name, and becomes useless. Other defects are more easily overlooked by parishioners, but immorality they deem too heinous an offence to be pardoned. They are rather inclined to suppose that the evil is greater than it really is; and when the unhappy man repents, they refuse to believe in the sincerity of his conversion.

But to preserve untarnished and unsullied the lily of purity it is indispensably necessary that we employ certain well defined means. In the first place we must cultivate the virtue of humility. St. Augustine remarks that oftentimes the grossest sins against purity are the punishment of a secret pride. Let us never trust ourselves; after many years of angelic purity our virtue may be swept away like a house of cards. Solomon despite his marvellous wisdom and long fidelity to God fell miserably when he was advanced in years; and David was no longer a young man when he fell into the sin of adultery. They sinned because they had not sufficient self-

diffidence and humility. Their fall has filled the world with astonishment; may it inspire us with a salutary fear. "Do not rely on your past chastity; for you are not holier than David, nor wiser than Solomon. Never forget that it was a woman that ejected the tenant of paradise from his possession.—There is great danger lurking in the services of her whose face you behold often" says St. Jerome.

Moreover it is well for us to remember always that there is a very close affinity between pride and impurity. Spiritual writers tell us that pride is to the soul what impurity is to the body. No wonder then that we so often find that those who are enslaved to pride are enslaved also to the vice of impurity.

That it is absolutely necessary for the preservation of the virtue of chastity to avoid resolutely, and even at the cost of great sacrifices, all wilful near occasions of sins against this virtue, no matter what their name or nature, needs no proof or argument. The priest knows this better than anyone else. Time and again he has inculcated the same lessons to his parishioners and penitents. Possibly he has found himself obliged to refuse absolution to one or other of them, because they would not give up some proximate occasion of grievous sin. But still it will not be out of place in a matter of such vital importance to quote here a number of directions and

instructions given for the priest's guidance by the Holy Spirit. What God Himself has considered necessary to tell us for our instruction must surely carry a great weight with us, unless indeed we have already lost the spirit of faith and become hardened in sin.

As one of the greatest dangers to the priest's chastity arises from familiarity with women, we find a large number of warnings on this head.

"You have heard that it hath been said to them of old: Thou shalt not commit adultery! But I say to you: that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt. 5, 28.)

"I made a covenant with my eyes that I would not so much as think upon a virgin. For what part should God from above have in me?" (Job 31, 1.)

"Look not upon a woman's beauty, and desire not a woman for her beauty. A woman's anger, and impudence and confusion is great." (Wis. 25, 28.)

"Let not thy heart covet a woman's beauty, and be not caught with her winks. For the price of a harlot is scarce one loaf; but the woman catcheth the precious soul of a man. Can a man hide fire in his bosom, and his garments not burn? Or can he walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?" (Prov. 6, 25.)

"Give not the power of thy soul to a woman, lest she enter upon thy strength, and thou be confounded.

Gaze not upon a maiden, lest her beauty be a stumbling block to thee. Look not round about thee in the ways of the city, nor wander up and down in the streets thereof. Turn away thy face from a woman dressed up, and gaze not upon another's beauty. For many have perished by the beauty of a woman, and hereby is lust enkindled as a fire." (Ecclus. 9.)

"Behold not everybody's beauty, and tarry not among women. For from garments cometh a moth, and from woman the iniquity of a man. For better is the iniquity of a man, than a woman doing a good turn, (flattery, presents, services?), and a woman bringing shame and reproach." (Ecclus. 42, 12.)

"She entangled (the young man) with many words, and drew him away with the flattery of her lips. Immediately he followed her as an ox led to be a victim, and as a lamb playing the wanton, and not knowing that he is drawn like a fool to bonds, till the arrow pierce his liver." (Prov. 7, 21.)

"Let not thy mind be drawn away in her ways, neither be thou deceived with her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded, and the strongest have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell." (Prov. 7, 25.)

With this formidable array of admonitions before us we can no longer be in doubt as to the absolute necessity of guarding carefully against fostering familiarities with persons of the other sex. To

imagine that we are safe and that we are proof against the dangers here indicated, would be nothing less than a presumptuous rashness to put the truth of God's words to a test. What else can be the result of such foolhardiness except a miserable fall sooner or later?

Finally, that we may resolutely avoid all voluntary occasions of sins of impurity, let us meditate frequently on these forceful warnings of our divine Master:

"If thy hand scandalize thee, cut it off. It is better for thee to enter into life, maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into unquenchable fire, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished.

"And if thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off. It is better for thee to enter lame into life everlasting than having two feet to be cast into the hell of unquenchable fire; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished.

"And if thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out. It is better for thee with one eye to enter into the kingdom of God, than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished. For every one shall be salted with fire." (Mark 9, 42.)

What else do these forceful words imply if not that we must heroically separate ourselves from every

object, place or person that is a wilful near occasion of sin to us, even if these are so dear or necessary to us that we think life impossible without them. To give up these occasions may in a certain sense inflict as great a pain on us as would attend the tearing out of an eye or the cutting off of a hand or foot; but if we value our soul's salvation, we have no other choice.

The Fourth Danger: Dissipation of Mind.

The fourth danger we shall mention is one which is not sufficiently feared by many priests; it is the danger of giving way to dissipation of mind and of losing the interior spirit. Those who have to do missionary work are especially exposed to this danger. Dissipation is destructive of the love of prayer and study; it is the enemy of gravity so much recommended to clergymen generally. It dries up the heart, extinguishes fervor, and prevents the pastor from instructing his flock with that tone of persuasive piety so remarkable in the discourses of saintly men. It makes him approach the altar without reverence and exterior decorum, celebrate hurriedly, slovenly and without devotion, and recite his office hastily and without attention.

The greatest care and watchfulness is required on our part not to yield to dissipation. Our functions, holy though they are, render us very liable to it. Watching over our flock, visiting the sick,

listening to those who come to consult us, answering all kinds of calls in the parlor, directing societies, attending to our domestic affairs, managing the temporalities of the church, making and receiving visits—all this is only too well calculated to dissipate us, and to give rise to a thousand useless thoughts and cares which are foreign to our profession and often dangerous to our virtue, and which will hinder recollection and union with God and destroy the interior spirit. Then our life will be more worldly than spiritual; our duties will be either omitted or performed badly; we shall discharge them without fidelity and exactness, without piety and love of God, and consequently without merit and without fruit. We shall become a mere "sounding brass and tinkling cymbal." "How numerous," exclaims St. Charles, "are the obstacles to the care and directions of souls that spring from unrestrained familiarity and intercourse with lay persons!"

It is true that the life of a pastor of souls ought to be different from that of a cloistered religious. The latter has chosen a life of retirement and seclusion and must therefore live entirely separated from men; while the pastor by very reason of his office is under necessity of being often with them and living in their midst. He must therefore learn the secret of maintaining an habitual union with God in the midst of the distracting elements by which he is

surrounded. If he goes abroad and mingles with the world only through necessity, to promote the interests of God and the welfare of souls, he runs but little risk, for he has the assurance of divine protection. But if he mingles with it on all occasions, through love of its diversions and attractions, and through a desire to share the pleasures and amusements of worldlings, he will soon become like to them and end by losing himself with them.

That a priest may successfully avoid this dissipation of mind, which in reality is only another name for worldliness, he should often meditate on the lessons which our divine Lord taught His disciples in order to wean them from attachment to the world and to impress on their minds the duty of becoming new men, men whose interior dispositions were to be in conformity with the exalted dignity He was about to confer on them. They who were to be "other Christs" must be formed to the image and likeness of the Son of God.

Our Lord calls His priests the "Salt of the earth." Salt is a substance which differs widely from the food which it is to season. Its action on food is infallible in the order of nature. It seasons the food, while the food does not destroy its seasoning properties. In the same way must the priest be altogether different from the people among whom he is sent to work. He must so act on them by the force of his good example,

and so influence their minds and hearts that they will be changed from carnal into spiritual men, that they may no longer be of the earth, earthy, but that "their conversation may be in heaven." The reverse must not take place. The example of world-minded people must not make him worldly and fond of earthly delights; for then the salt will lose its savor, and if it lose its savor wherewith shall it be salted? It will become worthless and fit only to be cast out and trodden on by men. And is it not a matter of common experience that priests who have become worldly are despised by the very persons with whom they make too free and in whose company they mingle too often?

Again, priests are called the "Light of the World." No one has ever witnessed the startling subversion of the laws of nature by which darkness has been able to extinguish a burning light. By an unchanging physical law light is the opposite of darkness and dispels it wherever it encounters it. No matter how dense the darkness may be, light conquers it, and thus establishes a condition by which the human eye can clearly see and distinguish material objects. So, too, must a priest's doctrine and good example be a bright light that will dispel the fatal darkness of religious error and ignorance, and enable people to walk the path of virtue and holiness by which alone they can hope to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, as in

the case of the salt, the reverse must not take place. The darkness of unbelief and irreligion and worldliness by which priests are surrounded on all sides, must not extinguish their light; else both they and their flocks are in danger of eternal perdition.

The Fifth Danger: Intercourse With Priests Devoid of the Ecclesiastical Spirit.

The fifth danger we must carefully guard against arises from intercourse with priests who have not the spirit of their holy state and who, instead of aiding us, contribute more, perhaps, than any other cause, by their bad example and their railleries, to the loss of our regularity and piety; we are in "perils from false brethren." It is hard and painful to be obliged to say this; but the truth must be told, if for no other reason than that young and inexperienced priests may learn how to be on their guard. St. Charles draws attention to this danger and inveighs against its authors. "Another impediment to the sacerdotal spirit is found in the evil conversations of bad priests. Would that there were only a few of those who not only do not themselves lead good lives, but they must needs also keep others from doing it, saying: 'What are you doing? Of what use are these reforms? What is the meaning of all these laws and regulations?' Woe to priests of this sort!"

St. John Baptist Vianney, Curé of Ars, that wonderful model of priests, whom God raised up in the last century as an example of what every minister of Christ should strive to be, speaks of this same danger and warns us that we must avoid associating with lax and worldly priests if we desire to foster the dispositions proper to our holy state. "My friend," he said to a young man who was preparing for sacred orders and asked him for counsel and advice, "the ruin of priests is the habit of going continually to visit each other. By all means, let them go occasionally and visit a brother-priest for mutual edification or for confession. But to be always running about!—That which prevents us priests from becoming saints is the want of reflection. We do not enter into ourselves; we do not know what we are doing. What we want is *Reflection, Prayer, Union with God.* Oh! how unhappy is the priest who is not interior! But to be interior we need silence and retirement—retirement—my friend, retirement. It is in solitude that God speaks to us."

Alas, it is only too true that there are many unfortunate priests, who, not satisfied with their own transgressions of the commandments of God and the regulations of their superiors, must needs endeavor by every means to make others do the same. If they see that you are trying to live up to the requirements of your holy state, they will cast ridicule upon your

actions which condemn their own irregular conduct. If they remark that you make your meditation faithfully every day; that you make your retreat annually; that you apply yourself to study and useful reading; that you prepare your instructions carefully; that you watch over your flock, visit the sick regularly, practice temperance and mortification, refuse to take part in unpriestly forms of recreation and in unbecoming and immodest jests and in uncharitable conversations—in one word, if you try to live a life of recollection and union with God, count upon it, they will call you scrupulous, narrow-minded, a stickler for minutiæ, a man with old-fogie notions about virtue, and the like. They will laugh at you and make fun of you on all occasions; they will ridicule you to your face and will tear your good name to shreds when you are absent.

All this is but what is to be expected. It is a great truth which St. Paul formulates in these words: "All they who will (i. e. are resolved to) live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3, 12.) Those who seek to conform their lives to the example of Jesus Christ, must be prepared to suffer the slow martyrdom of execution by evil tongues. They will attract to themselves all manner of blame and criticism and vituperation and heartless detraction and calumny, as a lightning-rod attracts the electricity that surrounds it. What we read in the

Book of Wisdom finds a literal fulfillment in the case of priests who seek to lead holy lives. "Let us lie in wait for the just man, because he is not for our turn, and he is contrary to our doings, and upbraideth us with transgressions of the law, and divulgeth against us the sins of our way of life. He boasteth that he hath the knowledge of God, and calleth himself the son of God. He is become a censurer of our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold; for his life is not like other men's, and his ways are very different. We are esteemed by him as triflers, and he abstaineth from our ways as filthiness, and he preferreth the latter end of the just, and glorieth that he hath God for his father.—Let us examine him by outrages and tortures, that we may know his meekness and try his patience." (Wis. 2, 12.)

But you must not fear the malice of these false brethren. Neither must you allow their bad example and their harsh criticism to influence you to waver in your resolutions. If you fear them more than God you shall end by abandoning the course of life you have adopted. But why be afraid of them? They are not your judges. You must possess fortitude enough to be able to say: "To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you, or by man's day;—he that judgeth me is the Lord." (1 Cor. 4, 3.) Imitate in this respect the example of the St.

John Vianney who for no less than ten years was made the butt of ridicule and persecution on the part of some of his brethren in the ministry, but nevertheless continued faithfully in his adopted mode of life and never swerved in the least from devoting his whole energy to the promotion of God's interests. He is now glorified and raised to the dignity of the altar—but who can tell what has become of his enemies and tormentors?

One more point must be touched on in this connection; it is the tendency which unfortunately is found in some priests to delight in the telling of improper jokes and stories, some of which are often downright immodest and obscene. And what aggravates this evil is the fact that not infrequently these things happen in the presence of lay persons, especially of domestics. It is impossible to deplore this unchristian conduct as it deserves. So too, is it wellnigh impossible to conceive how a priest who has only a spark of the spirit of faith in him, can so far forget himself as to employ his tongue, the very member which daily pronounces the sacred words of consecration and which is daily purpled with the precious Blood of the Son of God, in the telling of suggestive jokes and filthy stories, the mere thought of which is sufficient to cause the blush of shame to rise to the face of every pure-minded man. What must be the interior state of one who delights in this

kind of conversation, since our Lord Himself assures us that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh?"

"What were you treating of in the way?" our divine Savior once asked His apostles. But they were silent. They did not know what to answer. "For in the way they had disputed among themselves which of them should be the greatest." (Mark 9, 33.) What might we not witness if our Lord were to appear suddenly at some of the gatherings of priests and put the question: "My priests, what are you treating of?" Would not a deathlike silence be the only answer? Would not the blush of burning shame spread itself over their countenance? And would they not prefer the torment of fire to the searching and painful look He would cast upon them? Oh! that priests had a lively faith in the truth that one day they must stand before Him and render Him a strict account of every sinful word! Not a single one will be left unaccounted for. And what will they advance in defense or excuse? What will they say when confronted by the sins which they occasioned in those who listened to them?

It must not be forgotten that there are always, even among priests, certain weak souls, for whom such improper conversations prove to be the source of violent temptations against the virtue of holy purity, if not of actual sins. And what man is there that is

prepared to answer for the sins of which he is the occasion by the scandal he has given, when he can not even answer for his own? Priests are no exception in the application of the terrible sentence: "Woe to that man by whom scandal cometh." "It were better for him if a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and he should be drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matt. 18, 6.)

If St. Paul requires of the ordinary faithful that they should not even mention by name certain sins, how much more should God's anointed be scrupulously careful not to speak of things which must of necessity be the source of temptation and defilement of soul! What is needed to do away with this evil, is a lively faith in the truth contained in these words of our Lord: "By thy words thou shalt be justified; and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

The Sixth Danger: Undue Attachment to Parents and Relatives.

The sixth danger to which ecclesiastics are exposed has its source in an undue attachment to parents and relatives. The priest should ever keep in mind the example left to all future priests by the apostles at the first intimation of our Lord's will that they should follow Him. Thus we read that "passing by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fisher-

men. And He said to them: 'Come after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men.' And immediately leaving their nets, they followed Him. And going from thence a little further, He saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, who also were mending their nets in the ship; and forthwith He called them. And leaving their father Zebedee in the ship with his hired men, they followed Him." (Matt. 4, 18.)

"And immediately leaving their nets"—"and leaving their father Zebedee," these first disciples attach themselves inseparably to our Lord. Henceforth they have no other interests to engage their attention except to announce to the world the glad tidings of the gospel of salvation. They might have objected that their father stood in need of their help; and the father might have urged that his sons must remain at home to support the family; and that for these reasons it was out of question for them to heed the invitation. But when God calls, relatives have no right to place obstacles; and those who are called, must promptly and generously renounce everything: business, wealth, pleasure, home, brothers and sisters, father and mother, unless these last should be in real need and depend upon their children for support. "He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me." (Matt. 10, 37.)

Another instructive example is found in the con-

duct of Abraham. That he might render himself worthy of the honor of becoming the father of the chosen people of God he was required to leave his home and kindred. "Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee." (Gen. 12, 1). So too does God command priests to renounce the inordinate affections they may feel for their relatives, as a necessary condition not only to be His ministers, but even to be numbered among His followers.

St. Charles forcibly urges his clergy to imitate the example which our blessed Savior gives us of detachment from relatives. "This renunciation," he says, "Christ our Lord has taught us, not only by word, but also by His example. Would that all priests could say to their parents: 'Do you expect to receive a share of our income? You must know that we do not receive our income for you, but for our support, and for the benefit of the poor of Christ.'" When Christ was asked by His blessed mother: "Son, why hast Thou done so to us?" He replied: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" And when on one occasion a man came to our Lord and told Him that His mother and His brethren were standing in the crowd before the house and seeking to get near to Him in order to speak to Him, He said:

"Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?" And stretching forth His hand towards His disciples, He said: "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister and mother." (Matt. 12, 46.) Happy the priest who is able to practice a similar detachment from his relatives and friends.

Several Other Dangers.

Several other dangers to which we are exposed, spring from ourselves, from our own defects and from our bad inclinations, namely: ill humor and temper, want of courage, ignorance and violation of the rules of politeness, and the neglect of our own spiritual advancement.

1. *Temper and ill humor* often cause priests to mistake for zeal what is in reality only caprice, dislike or revenge. Hence their harsh and cutting expressions when correcting or giving advice; their violent invectives in the pulpit; remarks that are personal and that offend and embitter the guilty and scandalize the congregation, and far from correcting abuses and converting evil-doers, only make matters worse and harden the offenders to obstinacy. Hence the haughtiness and contempt which priests sometimes bear towards those who do not yield to their remonstrances. On the other hand priests subject to

caprice, sometimes make themselves too familiar with those who please them and show too much condescension towards those who enter into their views.

A priest should always bear in mind that nothing is easier than to cultivate the passion of temper without his being aware of it. For unless he is truly humble and willing to see his defects and to be reminded of them, he will soon become blind to them and not even suspect that he is subject to them. Besides, being accustomed to command and direct others, he will not allow himself to be contradicted. And lastly, there may be no one, not even among his friends and confreres, who has the courage to tell him of his faults. And thus it may happen that he will go on for years, perhaps all his lifetime, fostering and developing a passion which makes him shunned and feared by his people, and which neutralizes his best efforts to promote the glory of God.

An effective remedy for this unfortunate condition is found in the admonitions of a good friend and counsellor who is not afraid to speak the truth. The priest who is desirous of avoiding or correcting this defect (as well as others), will always receive such admonitions graciously and gratefully, mindful of the advice of Pope:

> "Trust not yourself; but your defects to know,
> Make use of every friend and every foe."

2. *Discouragement.* This is a defect which makes us abandon what we have commenced when after much labor we do not perceive any good results. How seldom does it happen that our zeal does not slacken when the looked for results do not crown our efforts. To prevent this, let us bear in mind that God does not reward our success, but rather our fidelity in the work we undertake for His honor and glory. The most barren land will produce for us fruits of eternal life if we cultivate it in obedience to God's holy will. And if we can not rejoice over the good accomplished by ourselves, we can at least mourn over the evil done by others and make atonement for the same. This latter occupation will not be without its reward. For it is to labor, toil and care that the reward is promised, not to success. "Every one shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." (1 Cor. 3, 8.)

3. *Ignorance* of certain rules of decorum and politeness, or a disregard for them, is often the reason why clergymen offend needlessly and thus spoil many chances of doing good to others. Without being aware of it they are brusque in their manner of acting; they sometimes keep people away by their haughty and imperious bearing; and having no regard for the various dispositions and wants of different persons, they alienate the members of their flock from themselves, often with the result that these

give up the practice of their faith. Let such priests by all means reflect that it is their duty to imitate the meekness and mildness of their divine Master, and become all things to all men, in order to gain all for Christ.

4. *The Neglect of their Own Perfection* is a defect of many pastors whose whole attention is engrossed with the external functions of their ministry or the mere material interests of their parish. It happens sometimes, as St. Bonaventure remarks, that priests while taking care of the salvation of others, neglect their own. Nearly all their time is spent in hearing confessions, attending the sick, catechizing, etc.; but they overlook their own spiritual necessities. They do not take the time necessary for meditation; they omit spiritual reading; they curtail their preparation before, and their thanksgiving after, Mass; they do not examine their conscience or do it only superficially; and they neglect altogether the exercise of the Particular Examen. The final result of all this omission of devotion and practices of piety essential for personal sanctification, is, that after having labored much for others, they have done nothing for themselves. Oh! let such as these follow the advice of St. Charles: "You have been charged with the care of souls; but do not on that account neglect the care of your own soul; and do not spend yourself too

freely for others, so as to have no time to devote to your own interests."

So too, are those priests in danger of neglecting their own perfection who are engrossed with material projects. Many there are who mistake the activity of the "brick and mortar priest" for genuine holiness and zeal. And how great the temptation to take complacency in a well equipped plant, or a beautifully decorated church, and to pride one's self in a knowledge, real or supposed, of architecture, or experience in building, or taste in selecting appropriate decorations. These and similar things can easily thrust self-sanctification into the background. The restless and feverish activity of the builder, the financier, the orator or the lecturer is often taken for genuine service of God.

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The consideration of the dangers consequent on the exercise of the sacred ministry should lead us to enter it only in obedience to the voice of God as manifested to us by the directions of our superiors. We should tremble at the very recollection that the functions we must perform daily, have been for many the occasion of eternal perdition. We should humble ourselves deeply in the presence of God, begging Him never to permit that the like misfortune befall

us. We should resolve to employ every means recommended and practiced by holy priests to ward off the dangers which threaten to be fatal to us. But on the other hand we should firmly rely on the divine assistance which will enable us to overcome every obstacle and every temptation, and will even turn dangers into means of greater holiness and virtue. God never forsakes those who are faithful to Him and place their trust in Him.

"God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able (to bear); but will also make with temptation issue that you may be able to bear it." (1. Cor. 10, 13.)

"God, who hath delivered, and doth deliver us out of so great dangers; in whom we trust that He will yet also deliver us." (2. Cor. 1, 10.)

THIRD CONSIDERATION

DIFFICULTIES OF THE SACRED PRIESTHOOD

It is an unquestioned fact that serious difficulties are met with in the sacred ministry. St. Gregory the Great, and after him the Council of Trent, calls the pastoral office a charge to be feared even by angels. A single reflection will convince us of the existence of these difficulties. To succeed in the pastoral charge, we must know how to deal with souls, and to direct each of them according to its natural dispositions and peculiar wants. To fail in this would be to lead them through ways arduous and dangerous for many, and impracticable for some. Now, as no two persons are alike in appearance, so also are their temperaments, dispositions, views, temptations and wants as various as their faces; how difficult then must it be to treat with each individual in a manner calculated to win his confidence and to make him adopt a regular and pious mode of life!

The difficulties of the pastoral office will be rendered still more evident by the consideration of the many duties which the priest has towards his flock. His principal duties consist in the instruct-

ing of the ignorant, in the administering of the Sacraments, in the care of the sick, in vigilance, prayer and good example. And will any one say that it is an easy matter to discharge all these obligations to their full extent? How much knowledge, zeal, fortitude and virtue are required to fulfill them usefully and constantly!

SECTION I. NATURE OF THE DIFFICULTIES

1. *Instruction of the Ignorant.*

To instruct the ignorant is the first and most important duty of a pastor to his flock. The words of Jethro to Moses are more than an advice to him who has charge of souls: "Be thou to the people in those things that pertain to God, to bring their words to Him; and to show the people the ceremonies and the manner of worshipping, and the way wherein they ought to walk, and the work that they ought to do." (Exod. 18, 19.) He is appointed to teach God's people "the difference between holy and profane, and show them how to discern between clean and unclean." (Ezech. 44, 23.) His duty to instruct extends to every kind of persons; he is a debtor to all; to the just and to sinners; to the young and to the old, to those who are intelligent and to those who are dull of intellect, to those who are docile and to those who resist, to those even who despise the word of God

and reject sound doctrine. He ought to give instruction on all the truths of the Christian Faith: If he confines himself to a few subjects which he repeats every year, he does not fulfill his obligation, because he does not enable his hearers to become fully acquainted with their faith and their religious duties. And if he, their pastor, fails to fulfill this office, from whom will they learn the truths which they must know in order to save their souls? As long as he has charge of his parish—and this may be for more than thirty or forty years—no other priest can intrude himself and do this necessary work in his stead. In the meantime more than a whole generation will have grown up without sufficient instruction to enable them to be fervent Christians and to "love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul, with their whole mind and their whole strength." (Luke 10, 26.)

Many of his charges will be lost eternally, simply because they lacked the knowledge necessary for salvation; others whom God had destined for greater things will attain only a moderate degree of perfection. And who can estimate the results which the evil of religious ignorance beginning in the present generation will produce in the next? The children of to-day will be the parents of to-morrow; and if these do not now receive a thorough training in their holy faith, they will not be able to hand down to their offspring the precious heirloom of a strong and liv-

ing faith. They will not be in a position to inspire them with an ardent love for their holy religion, nor will they be able to do their share in helping the priest to make them good and practical Catholics. We must bear in mind that the knowledge of one's religion is not inherited, any more than the knowledge of a foreign language; both must be acquired by painstaking instruction and study. And lastly the priest must realize, that instruction, and instruction only—preaching—has been appointed by the eternal wisdom of God as the one great means of spreading the light of the Gospel.

The pastor is likewise wanting in his duty if he does not prepare his instructions. They will be superficial; nothing impressive, nothing pathetic will be found in them; sometimes they will be obscure, sometimes diffuse; his decisions will be rashly given; he will enter into no details, or else they will be so ill-chosen and so ill-digested, that they will be more fit to disgust and scandalize his hearers than to instruct and edify them. But to be able to instruct all kinds of people, and on every speculative and practical subject that requires explanation, on dogma and morals, on all the duties of the various states of life, with solidity and clearness, with thoroughness and with unction, how much labor and serious study is necessary! One must be perfectly acquainted with Holy Scripture, well-read in theology, familiar with

works of piety. There is need of much reflection to make a proper selection of his subjects, to treat them in an interesting manner, and to deliver them, not as a profane orator, but as a man who feels what he says, and who seeks not the praises and applause of his hearers, but their conversion and salvation. This is indeed a great, but also a difficult undertaking.

That the pastor may stimulate himself to constant and unflagging fidelity in this most important of all his ministerial duties he should often reflect on the example left him by our Lord, who made it His very food and drink to preach the kingdom of God. "I have a meat to eat," He said to His disciples, "which you know not. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, that I may perfect His work.—Lift up your eyes and see the countries, for they are white already to harvest." (John 4, 32.) When the multitudes besought Him that He should not depart from them, but remain in their midst, He said to them: "Let us go into the neighboring towns and cities, that I may preach there also the kingdom of God; for to this purpose am I come." (Mark 1, 38.) And He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and every infirmity among the people. Again it is related that Jesus went through the villages and cities and towns, teaching in their synagogues and preach-

ing the gospel of the kingdom. . . . "And seeing the multitudes, He had compassion on them because they were distressed and lying like sheep that have no shepherd. And He said to His disciples: 'The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He send laborers into His Harvest.' " (Mk. 1, 36.)

Should not these examples of zeal for souls left us by our Chief Pastor rouse every priest charged with the duty of preaching the doctrine of eternal salvation, to devote himself heart and soul to this blessed work? There is no work that is more noble, more godlike than that of instructing men in the things that pertain to their eternal welfare. Moreover we must not lose sight of the fact that this duty can not be neglected without incurring the guilt of grievous sin. If a priest were perfect in the observance of the commandments and the practice of Christian virtue; if he possessed the grace of prayer in a high degree of perfection; but failed in this one point of fidelity in the work of instructing his flock, he would be guilty of mortal sin just as he would be if he gave himself up to intemperance or impurity.

In conclusion, we subjoin a quotation from the encyclical on religious instruction issued in 1905 by the saintly Pope Pius X. "In matters of religion" he says, "the majority of people in our times must

be considered ignorant.—There are vast multitudes, (in consequence of insufficient instruction in school and of neglect of instruction in the home, as also on account of compulsory education of the young without religion), who have so little knowledge of God and of Christian faith, that they live like idolaters in the very midst of the light of Christianity.—In consequence of this ignorance they see no crime in exciting hatred against their neighbor, in entering into most unjust contracts, in giving themselves up to dishonest speculations, in appropriating the property of others by enormous usury, in indulging without scruple in evil thoughts and in perpetrating various iniquities."

Surely no priest who has the glory of God and the welfare of souls ever so little at heart will deny that the Holy Father has here laid bare the root of the evils with which the modern world is afflicted. From ignorance of God and His holy law springs a complete disregard for things of the next life; and this in turn promotes unbridled indulgence in the forbidden pleasures that lead to eternal perdition.

2. *The Administration of the Sacraments.*

Numerous, too, are the difficulties connected with the administration of the Sacraments, especially of the Sacrament of Penance. It is by no means easy to follow the middle way between a misplaced se-

verity and an over-indulgent condescension. To know whether the dispositions of the penitent are sufficient or insufficient; whether his heart has forsaken sin or not; whether a bad habit has been formed; whether an occasion is wilful and proximate and one that simply *must* be given up; whether a period of trial before absolution is called for; whether there is cause for restitution; whether a certain contract is lawful; whether a certain marriage is valid or whether censure has been incurred—all this is difficult indeed. Nor is it an easy matter to tell that father, that married person, that merchant, that judge, that lawyer, that physician, how far precisely his obligations extend, what is lawful for him to do, and what he must not do under any circumstances. How many cases in which the most expert and the most learned do not know what to do and must have recourse to the knowledge of others!

Ignorant priests who do not see the reasons for and against, are incapable of doubting; the presumptuous who flatter themselves that they know everything, do not feel the difficulties of the tribunal of penance and of the other pastoral functions; while those who possess knowledge, good principles and experience, confess that they are often perplexed, knowing not what to do, and what remedy to propose in certain emergencies. How great, then, is the temerity of him who without knowledge, without

learning and without experience takes upon himself the care of a congregation! He is a blind guide who leads the blind to the precipice instead of drawing them out. St. Gregory the Great at the opening of his excellent work, *De Cura Pastorali,* complains of this abuse; "No art" he says, "is taken in hand to be taught without having been first learned by earnest study. With what rashness, then, is the office of pastoral teaching taken up by the unskilful, when the direction of souls is the very art of arts!"

If only these ignorant clergymen confined themselves to the discharge of the less difficult functions in small localities where piety flourishes! But no; they often take upon themselves what is most difficult in the ministry; they accept, and even ask for, a numerous and difficult congregation. What a misfortune, both for the people and for their presumptuous pastor! This happens sometimes, St. Gregory says, through a severe judgment of God; He punishes a bad congregation that has not profited by the labors of a good pastor by permitting that an unworthy one should succeed him.

The want of knowledge and other requisite qualities in that pastor, or that confessor, should keep penitents away from him. But through a fatal blindness he is consulted, he is preferred to others, he hears more confessions than two or three other priests together. He congratulates himself on this account and

proudly boasts of his record, whilst enlightened men mourn over it. What is it that draws the great crowd of penitents to his confessional? His too great facility to absolve them without having sufficiently examined and tried their dispositions; his want of energy in giving exhortations and corrections where they are necessary; his excessive indulgence towards those whom a conscientious confessor would oblige to seek reconciliation, to make restitution, to give up the wilful near occasions of sin, to give up a usurious traffic or sinful occupation, to regulate their household, to send their children to a Catholic school and keep them from dangerous environments, to be faithful to the discharge of the duties of their state of life, especially in the case of married persons who are guilty of violations of the sacred law of Christian matrimony, etc.

An ignorant or lax confessor will leave these persons undisturbed in their erroneous conscience, because he is unable or unwilling to give instruction where it is necessary; he will not insist that his penitents firmly resolve to renounce and give up sin and the wilful near occasions of sin if they are really desirous of obtaining forgiveness from God; and he does not remind them that without a sincere and firm purpose of amendment their confessions are nothing else than a sacrilegious mockery of God's holiness and justice. Briefly, by simply listening to the accusation

which they make in a routine and perfunctory manner, and then imposing a few prayers as a penance and reciting over them the formula of absolution, he makes confession easy both for himself and for his penitents. A very large number can in this way be heard in a few hours. No wonder that the confessional of such an accommodating confessor should be thronged with persons who deceive themselves and like to be deceived, or whose object is merely to save appearances.

Other confessors, however, follow a method quite opposite to this; they are excessively severe. Through want of knowledge, or through unfounded fear they refuse absolution to persons worthy to receive it. They leave them in the state of sin, throw them into a state of discouragement bordering on despondency; and cause some of them to abandon confession altogether. These two extremes, laxity and rigorism, are nearly equally prejudicial to souls; a middle course is necessary; but it is not easy to follow it.

3. *Visiting the Sick.*

Another duty assigned to pastors is that of visiting the sick and assisting the dying. It is not without its difficulties and troubles, especially in country districts and in inclement weather, and during epidemic and contagious diseases. Yet in all these cases it is the duty of the pastor to be ready for everything, and

he must not be satisfied with having seen his patients once and given them the last sacraments, but he should visit them regularly and often.

"No one," says Father O'Donnell in his book entitled *The Priest of To-day*, "can be surprised at the extreme solicitude of Christ and the Church for the welfare of the sick. Supreme issues depend upon the death-bed. An immortal soul passes out of life, and its fate for all eternity will be decided by its attitude at the time of its departure. As the tree falls, so will it lie. And yet, though people generally die as they live, sickness often brings great peril for the good, and special graces even for the wicked. Few, says Thomas à Kempis, are made better by sickness; and an experienced priest, accustomed to diagnose different cases, will readily realize that 'illness indeed maketh the soul sober," and imparts a lowly sense of dependence; but that its general trend is toward dullness of mind, depression, despondency and extreme sensitiveness. Hence, if ever, the Sacraments—those channels of grace and strength and comfort,—are of utmost value and necessity in the trying time of sickness and enfeeblement. Even the best need, like athletes, to be anointed for the final wrestle; their sinking hearts must be braced with courage, their patience sustained with sympathy and hope. If any die neglected, if dying hearts are not touched, if the sick-room ceases to be "the chief arena

of sacerdotal activity," the priest will be faithless to his mission, his power to cure will lie barren, his own heart will freeze and harden.

There is no field of the ministry that yields so rich and ripe a harvest as the vigilant care of the sick. It brings blessings to the priest, credit to the Church, and comfort to the flock. Happy is the sympathetic and merciful priest. His people confide in him; they turn to him in all their crosses and hope to be comforted by him in the hour of death. In the evil day God shows him the same measure of mercy that he showed to others; and even the world in his case grows prodigal of love and admiration. If the clergy of the Catholic Church are never afraid to face disease in the humblest hovel, never dismayed by fever or pestilence, always willing to surrender their ease and even their lives on behalf of their flock, it is, and ever will be, because they have no human ties or interests to chain them, because their only aim in life is to gain souls; because they count *one* soul, the soul even of a Lazarus, more precious than all the pride, power and wealth of the world.

What are all things but the merest refuse, says St. Paul, compared with the exceeding value of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ and of winning the prize of the heavenly vocation which God has given to all men through Him? What then doth it profit a priest if he gain the whole world but suffer the loss of a single

soul; if he prove a hindrance and a stumbling-block to one of the lowly ones who believe in Christ? If a soul be lost through the priest's fault, it will curse him for all eternity."

We shall conclude this subject with a quotation from Bishop Moriarty's Allocutions concerning the solicitude a pastor must have for the sick and dying. "Venerable Brethren: you know that all our labor will have been in vain if we do not secure for our people a holy death, which means final perseverance. How strange if the captain of a ship brought his vessel across the great ocean, and at the moment of entering the harbor, when it had to be piloted into port, abandoned it and let it drift upon the rocks and shoals. No, Venerable Brethren, we must never let go our hold and guidance of the soul until we have sent it clear across the threshold of eternity. Nor must we leave it then. We must follow it with our prayers, and remember it in our sacrifices.

Now, in practice, what are we to do? We must visit the sick at once, even before we are called. "As soon as he learns," says the Ritual, "that any one of the faithful under his charge has fallen sick, he must of his own accord go to see him and not wait till he is called." O my God, when I hear of a priest scolding, complaining, disputing, deferring on the occasion of a sick-call, I think of the country where I spent some years, and where the priest has often to use

every artifice to get into the presence of the sick, and when he gets there, often meets only the repulse of the dying reprobate; and then I fear lest my turn may be coming.

"And not only once, but repeatedly," continues the Ritual. The usual interpretation of this is that we should visit the sick every week during their illness. If possible, we should visit them at the moment of death.

There are the sick in danger of death, and there are the sick confined to their houses by chronic illness of long duration. I have met some who had been frequent communicants when in their health, and who in tedious illness did not make their Easter-duty. I asked them how this came to pass. They had no idea of calling the priest as there was no danger of death. Now mark how directly opposed this is to the spirit of the Church. In the chapter "De Communione Infirmorum," we read: "Let the pastor exhort the sick that they receive Holy Communion, though they are not dangerously ill, nor in danger of death, especially on the various feastdays that may occur."

4. *Pastoral Vigilance.*

Another duty of grave responsibility and one that is difficult to fulfill properly, is pastoral vigilance. Every priest charged with the care of souls is in conscience bound to watch over those committed to him

as a shepherd watches over his flock. This is not a matter of choice or option; it is a solemn duty. The eternal lot of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of souls will be decided by the manner in which he fulfills it. He was sent forth into the field of labor with this instruction: "Take heed to yourself and to the whole flock, wherein the Holy Ghost has placed you as a bishop, to rule the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own Blood." And God says to him as He said to the prophet Ezechiel: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel, and thou shalt hear the word out of my mouth and shall tell it to them for me."

This vigilance must first of all be universal. Since the pastor has to answer for all the members of his flock, he ought to watch over all without exception. Let him not forget that they have all been redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ and therefore deserve that he should watch over them and care for them with all possible solicitude. But how difficult to extend this vigilance to all in a large and numerous parish! For that purpose, says St. John Chrysostom, a pastor should have eyes on all sides. Young people and those of a more mature age, fathers and mothers with their children, masters and servants, rich and poor, schools, fraternities, pious societies, places of amusement—these are the principal objects of pastoral vigilance. "I have made thee a

watchman to the house of Israel." If it is an arduous task for the father of a numerous family to watch over it and manage it properly, how much more difficult is it to watch over several hundreds of people and neglect nothing to keep them from vice and lead them in the path of virtue.

In the next place this vigilance must be prudent. If it is not so, it must of necessity excite distrust and murmurs. The pastor ought to be watchful and know what is going on in his parish, but without having the name of an inquisitive man who is continually on the lookout, and without its being known by what means he obtains information of the evil which is committed. If his parishioners perceive that he listens to tale-bearers, these will be hated and he himself despised. In many cases he ought to act with so much prudence that he who gives the information should not perceive that his words are relied on; otherwise it will make him feel his importance or cause him to divulge what should remain secret. How much caution and presence of mind are required not to form conclusions and pronounce judgment before the facts are well ascertained and not to say more than is necessary in regard to persons and circumstances! An advice given at an unseasonable time, or in a harsh manner, or before certain persons, may spoil everything; it may offend, or dishearten, or render difficult the conversion of

the sinner. It is in this connection that St. Chrysostom says: "A pastor stands greatly in need of prudence. He requires, so to speak, a thousand eyes, that he may be able to study the dispositions of men from every point of view."

Further, this vigilance must be constant. We should always watch, from the first day we take charge of our congregation until death. We should never lose sight of those for whose salvation we are bound to labor. Never must we forget that the enemy of souls at no time relaxes in his endeavors to encompass their eternal perdition. Those who profit by our ministry should be kept in their good dispositions and made to improve; those who abuse it should be admonished when a favorable opportunity presents itself; those who avoid us should be brought back by kind and moving exhortations; those who place much confidence in us should be told what they would not willingly hear from others; those who distrust us should be treated with great consideration so as to win their confidence and thereby gain them to the service of God. What our Savior said to His apostles may with great reason be said to all pastors: "Watch ye at all times!" A vigilant pastor commands the respect of his parish and causes regularity to flourish. If he slumbers, the flock will be scattered; wolves will attack and devour it.

Lastly, the pastor's vigilance must extend to all the

dangers which menace the salvation of the souls entrusted to his care. He must have a lively faith in, and a practical conviction of, the truth that the devil is incessantly prowling around in his parish like a roaring lion seeking to devour souls destined for heaven. In this war on them he never rests. He brings every conceivable weapon of destruction into the field. He is continually varying his mode of attack. The pastor who does not realize this, is not a shepherd; he is merely a hireling who has no care of his sheep.

5. *Some Special Dangers.*

Let us briefly note some of the special dangers to which the faithful are exposed, particularly in these days of general apostasy from God and of a return to a new form of paganism.

In the first place our Catholic people form a small minority in a vast population of non-Catholics, the greater majority of whom profess no religion whatever, and are therefore to all intents and purposes what we can call only neo-pagans. No serious thought of God and of His holy law ever enters into their minds. Nearly a century's experiment in education with absolute exclusion of all religious teaching has produced a generation of men and women who look upon religion with contempt and treat the Ten Commandments as destroyers of human liberty.

Their code of morality is prompted by the dictates of fallen nature—the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Theirs is a purely animal existence, with no thought of eternity or salvation to place a check on their quest of sinful pleasure. In fact, for about half a century our rising generations have been indoctrinated with the blighting creed of materialistic evolution, by which they are taught that man is nothing more than a highly developed animal; that he has no immortal soul, and that there is for him no hereafter, no heaven and no hell. There are no commandments by which he must regulate his conduct; he has a perfect right to enjoy to the fullest all the pleasures this life has to offer him; there is no free will, and hence no virtue and no vice; what good or evil he does is simply the product of chemical changes that go on in his brain and nervous system.

In view of the fact that this diabolical philosophy of human life has been inculcated into the minds and hearts of millions of our people, can we affect any surprise at the rising tide of immorality that threatens to sweep away our much boasted civilization? Can we express surprise when we see all around us a mad pursuit of sinful pleasures and a rapid decay of the moral sense? When we find that large numbers make it the sum-total of their morality to "Eat and drink and enjoy themselves, for to-morrow they must die?" When we find an alarming growth of im-

morality of the worst kind among the young who attend secular high-schools, colleges and universities? And when the varied forms of impurity and unchastity are boldly flaunted before the public on the plea that these things are only natural and what is natural has a right to be shown and enjoyed? No, this is a necessary result of a century's godless education coupled with the inculcation of the grossest materialistic views of human life.

Our Catholic people must of necessity live in this pestiferous atmosphere surcharged with the poisonous exhalations of utter godlessness and immorality. They come in close contact with it in their daily work, business, friendships and social connections; they encounter it in the lectures they hear, in the moving pictures they go to see, and in the books, magazines and daily papers they read with unfailing regularity, while they seldom or never read a religious and instructive book or paper of any kind. For our people to move continually in this atmosphere of godlessness and not be contaminated by it, not suffer in the purity and firmness of their faith and in the integrity of their morals, would require as great a miracle as is required for the raising of the dead to life.

Add to this the sad fact that probably not more than half of our people have had the advantages of a fairly complete course of instruction in their faith, while the other half never attended any other but pub-

lic schools, and it is easy to see that among large numbers of Catholics the supernatural does not play a very important part in their lives. What, for example, must be the final effect produced on children attending schools where no attention whatever is given to moral training; and where their purity and innocence are hopelessly blasted by the bad example of corrupted boys and girls?

In consequence of all this is it any wonder that Christian ideals have disappeared from many a Catholic home and pagan ideals have taken their place? What loose notions, for example, are often found among Catholic people, especially among the wealthier class, about the sacredness of marriage, about its duties and obligations, about the sinfulness of divorce and adultery, and especially of the heinous crimes of abortion and onanism, or birth-control, as modern Herodians choose to call it. Not so many years ago many pastors could rejoice in the knowledge that their people were ignorant and innocent of those heinous sins which directly aim at subverting the end of marriage; but to-day there are very few priests, even in the remotest country-districts, who must not deplore the fact that these evils have established themselves even there. By means of literature sold by itinerant purveyors or sent through the mail, the knowledge of these abominations has become widespread among all classes of people. Truly, the devil has not been idle;

while on the other hand many a priest has persisted in ignoring the true nature of the dangers which threatened his people.

In the next place there are the dangers to which the purity and chastity of our young people is exposed by reason of promiscuous company-keeping. In consequence of the great decay which religion has suffered in the past few decades, and the example set by non-Catholic youth, many of our young men and women, and even boys and girls, engage in this unlawful pastime, so fraught with temptations and occasions of sins contrary to the sixth and ninth commandments. Many of them thus live for years in the voluntary proximate occasion of grievous sin, simply because they claim that what everybody is doing can not be wrong. And what is the outcome? Loss of innocence and virtue, and a life of sacrilege; for no one can receive the Sacraments worthily who does not give up the voluntary proximate occasion of mortal sin. And if we have to deplore the fact that so many young people gradually give up the practice of their religion, must we not look for the cause in indulgence in sins of impurity? The quickest and shortest road to apostasy is indulgence in the vice of unchastity. The devil knows this full well; hence the many arguments we find advanced for the toleration of conditions that make for the prevalence of this vice.

Consider in the third place the dangers that are

provided by much of the literature of the day and the daily press with its details of crime and vice and its countless illustrations of a lascivious and corrupting character. Young people, especially children, who see these day after day, will soon have their sense of modesty so dulled, that virtue will make no appeal to them. The tares of irreligion and immorality are sown in their hearts; what wonder if they go astray and are lost to the Church? Yet how few pastors take this point seriously enough to warn their people and to promote among them the practice of good and instructive reading?

It will not be out of place in this connection to quote from an article entitled: "What are our people reading?" which appeared in a Catholic journal some years ago. "Father Exupere, O. M. Cap., relates that a young man instituted an enquiry in various parishes of the Bayonne diocese (France), to learn what people were reading. The bad papers prevailed; there being about one hundred and fifty bad to ten good ones. And this was in the Basque region, which has such a good reputation. 'How many of the confessors and pastors present at that conference (in which this report was read), had kept a vigilant eye on this evil which had for years been spreading under their very noses? What barrier did they strive to raise against it? Did they go to the trouble of interrogating their penitents with regard to

the newspapers they were reading? Did they ever think of denying absolution to the canvassers and subscribers to anti-Catholic journals? Did they instruct the faithful from the pulpit on the sinfulness of their conduct and the danger to which they exposed their faith by reading bad papers?' There can be no question, in the light of all that we have heard and read, that negligence in regard to the things that people read, is one of the chief causes of the decadence of religion and morality in unhappy France. What a lesson this ought to teach American Catholics, so many of whom day by day feed on the husks of the secular, not to say "yellow" and anti-Catholic newspapers?" (Fortnightly Review 1910 Page 116.)

Lastly, there is that new source of danger, the movie, which in the hands of unscrupulous managers has become for the ruin of souls what the machine-gun and poison-gas are on the modern battlefield. Pandering, as so many productions do, to the basest and strongest passions, they threaten to destroy completely even the very roots of the virtue of purity in our children and growing youth. Even before they are old enough to know the difference between good and evil, their minds are debauched by the oft repeated exhibition of every imaginable form of moral depravity and turpitude, and every phase of the vexing sex problem. The things that St. Paul says should not even be mentioned by name among Chris-

tians, are there vividly shown on the screen with the result that the very foundation of virtue is destroyed. And how indeed will either the religious teacher or the confessor be able to instil into the hearts of such children a love for purity and chastity, when already in childhood they have learned to look upon the various violations of the sixth commandment as an everyday thing and as a form of legitimate pleasure? As well might you expect a tree to produce a large crop of luscious fruit after a killing frost has ruined every blossom, as expect to cultivate the beautiful lily of purity in hearts that have been blighted by immoral and suggestive movies.

So bad in regard to matters of purity have things become that even civil authorities, who certainly can not be said to possess over-sensitive consciences in these things, are beginning to see the necessity of doing something to raise the standards of our deeply sunken morality. The words of the President of the National Purity League, B. S. Steadwell, deserve to be quoted in this connection: "Opportunities are multiplying for sex temptation and license. The associations of the sexes are largely unguarded during those years when sex-passion is strongest; marriage is being deferred until middle life; divorce is increasing; most authorities agree that abortion is on the increase. Add to these conditions the fact that the sex-appeal is universal, everywhere, in the newspapers

(especially the Roto-gravure section), the theatre, the movies, the street carnival, the dance, the fair. The successful novel depends on it, our magazines cater to it, society reeks with it, the home is steeped in it, the school condones it; and if we do not soon turn about face, we will be where some of the oriental peoples stand—we will worship it."

Since therefore our Catholic people are surrounded on all sides by innumerable dangers, many of them exceedingly grave and serious, it becomes the solemn duty of the pastor to exercise continual vigilance, lest the threat be executed against him: "My sheep were scattered, because there was no shepherd. My flocks were scattered upon the face of the earth, and there was none that sought them; there was none, I say, that sought them. Behold, I myself will come upon my shepherds; I will require my flocks at their hand." (Ezech. 34.)

The flock whose pastor does not watch, is as if it had none. Why do some congregations, which at one time were very fervent and edifying, become disorderly and scandalous? It is because the pastor who formerly was so vigilant that nothing escaped him, is now slumbering. He is become indolent, more occupied with temporal affairs and his ease and comfort than with the wants and needs of his people. They soon feel the effects of this change of attitude. They no longer fear his presence; holy practices

cease to be observed; devotion languishes and lukewarmness makes its paralysing influence felt in the parish. "His watchmen are all blind; they are all ignorant; dumb dogs, not able to bark; seeing vain things; sleeping and loving dreams." (Isaias 56, 10.) And our Lord complains of indolent priests: "While men were asleep, an enemy came and sowed cockle among the wheat." (Matt. 13, 15.)

St. Charles, in the third discourse already cited, describes and laments the crime of a pastor, who after having begotten children to Jesus Christ, forsakes them as if after having given them spiritual life, everything was done, and they needed no longer his care to preserve it. "Alas," exclaims the holy cardinal, " many pastors there are who beget Jesus Christ in many souls, but after that neglect to care for them. What an impiety is this! Not even the beasts do this; for they suckle their offspring, cherish and feed them, and defend them in time of danger—and you abandon these little ones! While you ought to be laboring for them in the sweat of your brow, you give yourself up to a life of leisure. This laziness is a great crime; it is great cruelty. Would these same priests, if they were seriously ill, wish that their physician abandon them before they are restored to health?—The demon, my brethren, is never asleep, but is continually laying snares for souls.—Hence we must

exercise a constant solicitude, and seek to preserve those whom we have begotten in Jesus Christ."

Pastors should therefore guard most carefully against relaxing in this duty of vigilance, lest these words of the poet Cowper be fulfilled in their case:

"When nations perish in their sins,
'Tis in the church the leprosy begins;
The priest whose office is with zeal sincere,
To watch the fountain and to keep it clear,
Carelessly nods and sleeps upon the brink,
While others poison what the flock must drink."

6. *Correction.*

Another pastoral duty which is as difficult as it is necessary is that of correction. "Rebuke the unquiet," says St. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians; and when he reminded Timothy of this same obligation, he alluded to the difficulty of doing it well. "Reprove," he says, "entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine." (2 Tim. 4, 2.) How much prudence, mildness, tact, presence of mind, patience and firmness are requisite to correct the guilty, at the time and in the manner best calculated to succeed in recalling them to their duty, particularly when they are persons of rank, or those from whom we have received some favor or kindness, or those who are likely to cause trouble. "Presents and gifts blind the eyes of

judges and make them dumb in the mouth, so that they can not correct." (Ecclus. 20, 31.)

In order to fulfill this pastoral duty in the proper manner, the pastor should imitate St. John the Baptist in his courageous appearance before the incestuous Herod to tell him: "It is not lawful." True, in many cases the fearless discharge of his duty will only earn for him the hatred of the wicked; but often, too, it will result in the conversion and amendment of those who are thus reproved. To fortify himself against fear and cowardice, let him meditate often on the commission which the prophet Jeremias received from God. When God said to him: "I sanctified thee, and made thee a prophet unto the nations," Jeremias replied: "Ah, ah, ah, Lord, behold, I can not speak, for I am a child." And the Lord said to him: "Say not: I am a child; for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee to, and whatsoever I shall command thee, thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their presence, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord." And the Lord put forth his hand and touched his mouth, and said to him: "Behold, I have given my words in thy mouth. Lo, I have set thee this day over the nations, and over kingdoms, to root up, and to pull down, and to waste, and to destroy, and to build, and to plant.—Speak to them all that I command thee. Be not afraid of their presence, for I will make thee not to fear their countenance. For

behold, I have made thee this day a fortified city, and a pillar of iron, and a wall of brass, over all the land, to the kings of Judea, to the princes thereof, and to the priests and to the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee and shall not prevail; for I am with thee to deliver thee." (Jeremias 1.)

In the same way the pastor should consider as addressed to himself the words that God spoke to the prophet Ezechial: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel; and thou shalt hear the word out of my mouth and shalt tell it to them from me. If, when I say to the wicked: Thou shalt surely die;—thou declare it not to him nor speak to him, that he may be converted from his wicked way and live; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but I will require his blood at thy hand. But if thou give warning to the wicked and he be not converted from his wickedness and from his evil way, he indeed shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul." (Ezech. 3, 17.)

Lastly, good example must always re-inforce the instructions and exhortations which the pastor is bound to give to his people. But how great ought to be the vigilance which he must exercise over himself, so as to say nothing and do nothing contrary to those rules of conduct which he proposes to others! This is perhaps the most difficult duty of the ministry to fulfill; the one whose transgression may have the most baneful

consequences with respect to the people. A priest placed over others should then regard it as something belonging essentially to his office; and it is in order that he may never lose sight of it, that the Scriptures, the Fathers and the Councils remind him of it without ceasing.

Christ says to His priests as He said to His apostles: "You are the light of the world; you are the salt of the earth; you are a city built on a mountain." (Matt. 5, 13.) St. Peter urges them that they should earnestly endeavor to become the models of their flocks: "Being made a pattern of the flock from the heart." (1. Pet. 5, 3.) St. Paul constantly put his disciples in mind of the necessity of setting good example. He writes to Timothy: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example to the faithful in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in chastity." (1. Tim. 4, 12.) To Titus he writes: "In all things show thyself an example of good works; in doctrine, in integrity, in gravity, the sound word that can not be blamed; that he who is on the contrary part, may be afraid, having no evil to say of us." (Titus 2, 7.)

St. Jerome in his admirable letter to Nepotian urges upon him the necessity of giving good example in the following words: "Let not your deeds belie your words, that no one, when you preach, may be able to say: Why do you not yourself do that which you

prescribe to others? The tongue, the mind, the actions of the priest of Christ must all be in perfect accord."

St. Francis de Sales used to say that we ought to speak to the eyes of our people as well as to their ears. The former is done by good example, the latter by words. Such is also the remark of St. Chrysostom: "Those things which are said by us are not considered as much as those which are done by us." And St. Vincent de Paul inculcated the same maxim: "We ought, after the example of our Lord, to be the first to practice what we teach. Jesus began to do and to teach."

Let us never forget the beautiful passage of the Council of Trent on this subject; it breathes the spirit of God who is its author: "There is nothing that contributes more to the promotion of piety and the honor of God than the life and example of those who have dedicated themselves to the divine ministry. For they occupy so lofty a place and are elevated so high above the things of this world, that the people look upon them as upon a mirror in which to learn what they themselves are to do. Hence it strictly behooves clerics who are called to the inheritance of the Lord so to regulate their lives and their conduct, that nothing may appear in their dress, comportment, walk, conversation and everything else, but what is grave, serious and full of the spirit of religion.

They ought to avoid even small faults—which in them are not small but serious—so that their manner of acting may command the respect of all."

Amiable Jesus, I need Thy grace to fulfill duties so important and so extensive; I ask it of Thee most fervently. Let my life be such that all may imitate it. May nothing appear in my words, my actions and in my whole person which may contradict what I announce to them in Thy name. May my actions, even more than my words, point out to others the way of salvation. Grant me this grace for the glory of Thy holy name, and the sanctification of the souls entrusted to me. In Thy mercy grant me this grace.

SECTION II. CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS

1. *Reflection and Consideration.*

Since the sacred ministry is encompassed by so many serious difficulties and dangers, no one should enter it of his own accord, from low and unworthy motives and without a divine vocation; for this would be a rashness which God would punish with great severity. Can we suppose that He will grant the particular graces and the special assistance which make and sustain apostolic laborers, to a rash intruder who assumes the direction of souls without His orders and even against His will? A pastor of this kind will lose himself in performing his holy functions

and will also cause the loss of numerous souls. God never punishes a congregation in a more dreadful manner than by permitting it to be entrusted to a man who is not according to His own heart.

Therefore before taking charge of souls a cleric should consult, not his family, not his or their interests, not flesh and blood, but God alone and those of His ministers to whom he has manifested his interior and who, having in view the glory of the Most High, the good of the Church and the salvation of souls, will give him prudent advice. But let him consult with sincerity. If he has unworthy, secret and interested views, if he manifest not all his dispositions, if he use duplicity, his punishment will be that he will be deceived even by those who have no other intention than that of directing him well. "Woe to them that are of double heart." (Ecclus. 2, 14.)

If then, after taking the necessary means, you have learned that you are truly called to the holy ministry, put your whole trust in the Lord who has chosen you. He is infinitely wise; He is infinitely good; He is all powerful. He loves to perform the greatest works with the weakest instruments. If He lays a heavy burden on you, He will assist you to carry it; or rather, as St. Francis de Sales expresses himself, He will carry you with your burden. Distrust yourself completely, but cultivate a boundless trust in God. He will be with you in all dangers and difficulties; He

has promised it: "I will be with you all days." (Matt. 28, 20.) It is for His glory you exercise your formidable office; it is by His orders, under His eyes, and for the salvation of the souls so dear to Him; He cannot fail to aid you with His grace.

But confidence, even the most perfect, is not sufficient. You must still fear, and watch and pray. You must stand in fear of your own frailty, for it is very great and will endure as long as you live. You must watch to foresee dangers, to detect snares and to remove obstacles. You must pray unceasingly to draw down on yourself grace, fortitude and victory. "Watch ye; praying at all times." (Luke 21, 36.) In times of danger often say to God with the Royal Prophet: "Strengthen me with a perfect spirit," (Ps. 50, 14), or with Judith: "Strengthen me, O Lord, in this hour, that I may bring to pass that which I purposed, having belief that it might be done by Thee," (Judith 13, 7); or with the Apostles: "Lord, save us; we perish," (Matt. 8, 25); but let us say it, not with the distrust which our Lord blamed in them, but with a lively confidence in the goodness of Him who has promised to be with us in dangers and to deliver us from them: "I am with him in tribulation; I will deliver him and I will glorify him." (Ps. 90, 15.)

In perplexing cases, in concerns of a critical nature, if time allows it, tranquilly consult the Father

of Light, as well as those who are able to guide you. Do nothing precipitately. Such was the practice of St. Charles, St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul. If in spite of all this your efforts should be fruitless, you shall at least have the consolation of knowing that you have followed the dictates of prudence and of not being answerable for want of success. If the affair is a pressing one and it is impossible to reflect long and seek counsel, a fervent aspiration to God will bring down a ray of divine light which will show you the right path. "O God, as we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to Thee." (2 Paral. 20, 12.)

Often call to mind the difficulties and dangers of the ministry. It is a remedy against pride and presumption, and against sloth and negligence; it is a powerful incentive to humility, to distrust in ourselves, to vigilance, attention and exactness. Such should be the effects which the reflections we have offered on the dangers and difficulties of the pastoral office should produce. But if they should tend to produce discouragement and distrust in God, this would be the effect of pusillanimity and false humility.

Finally, if you happen to fall into a snare and succumb to some difficulty or have the misfortune to commit some serious fault, you must humble yourself and, without yielding to despondency, have immedi-

ate recourse to God. Your fall was the consequence of infidelity to grace, or perhaps of your temerity. Henceforth you must rely more on God and less on yourself. Watch more assiduously and be more attentive to divine inspirations; and after having sincerely repented of your sin, go to receive the remission of it in the tribunal of penance. "Let us therefore go with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid." (Heb. 4, 16.)

If you have remained faithful, frequently thank God for it, and refer all the glory to Him. "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory." (Ps. 113, 1.) It is His mighty hand that has preserved us from falling: "The right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength." (Ps. 117, 16.)

2. *Requisite Knowledge.*

In the next place examine whether you have the qualifications and dispositions necessary for fruitfully exercising the pastoral office, or are lacking in them. Recall the words of our Lord: "Which of you, having a mind to build a tower, doth not first sit down to reckon the charges that are necessary whether he have withal to finish it; lest after he hath laid the foundation and is not able to finish it, all that see it begin to mock him, saying: This man began to build and is not able to finish." (Luke 14, 28.) Then

entering into details, examine yourself on the following points:

Have you sufficient knowledge of theology? Have you studied all the treatises? If there are some which you have not mastered or have studied only superficially, you expose yourself to the danger of teaching error in catechising and preaching, of deciding wrongly in the tribunal of penance, of calling good what is evil, and evil what is good, and of giving instructions which are destitute of method and solidity.

Have you acquired the habit of reading and meditating the Holy Scriptures? If you are not familiar with the word of God how will you speak in the pulpit, in the confessional, at the sick-bed, and on many other occasions as a minister of God ought to speak? Your discourses and exhortations will be dry, weak, cold, without piety and unction.

Are you conversant with spiritual books? They develop the maxims of the Gospel and present them in a forcible manner to the mind and heart. If you neglect spiritual reading you will not be able to speak from the abundance of the heart; there will be no solidity to your instructions; there will be many words but little substance.

Are you sufficiently acquainted with the prescriptions of the Ritual, of the Ceremonial, and of the rubrics of the Missal? Have you a competent knowl-

edge of the ecclesiastical rites so as to perform them with that exactness, modesty and dignity which edifies the faithful and fills them with respect and reverence for sacred things? If you know them but imperfectly and perform them badly, you will make many mistakes which offend God and scandalize the people. Never forget that disobedience to the Church in regard to ceremonies and slovenliness in performing them always proceed from a want of the spirit of faith and indicate a woeful absence of the love of God. "They that fear the Lord will seek after the things that are well pleasing to Him; they shall love Him and keep His way." (Ecclus. 42, 9.) "When you exalt Him, put forth all your strength and be not weary; for you can never go far enough." (Eccli. 43, 34.)

Do you know the statutes of your diocese? If you are ignorant of them, you will often violate them without knowing it and hence without repenting of your disobedience; but what about the account you will have to render to God in the hour of your judgment?

Have you studied Ascetic Theology, which contains the directions to be observed in the spiritual guidance of souls? Or are you one of those who consider this subject a useless and superfluous one? Are you unaware of the fact that God calls certain souls to aspire after perfection, and that all such stand in need of proper guidance and direction? To whom are they

to turn if not to the priest who is commissioned to dispense the knowledge of the spiritual life? And if you are recreant to your duty, to whom will they have recourse? Will not God demand a strict account of you if souls have been defrauded by you of the graces and merits that were intended for them?

And finally, have you yourself acquired, and are you striving to acquire, the Science of the Saints, which consists more in the affections of the heart than in the sterile knowledge of the mind; and is made up of the knowledge of the divine Perfections and the mysteries of religion accompanied with lively sentiments of piety and love of God? This necessary science is learned more at the foot of the crucifix than in books. Without it you will make no impression on your hearers when you speak of God, because your own heart will be cold and unmoved, and your dissipated life will contradict your words.

3. *Love of Study.*

Are you devoted to the study of ecclesiastical subjects? Application to study will be an excellent remedy against temptation and sin. It will enable you to preserve and increase your stock of learning and fit you better to teach and govern your flock. But if you dislike study and indulge a love of ease and sloth, temptations will become more frequent, more strong and generally more fatal. "Idleness hath taught

much evil." (Ecclus. 33, 29.) You will abandon regularity; you will gradually forget what you have learned; your instructions will be less solid, your decisions given at random, your functions neglected, your ministry rendered less useful, and your congregation will soon resemble the field of the sluggard mentioned by the Wise Man: "I passed by the vineyard of the slothful man—and behold, it was filled with nettles, and the thorns had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall was broken down." (Prov. 24, 30.)

But your studies must be properly regulated. Banish not only all bad and dangerous books, but also those which are useless to a person of your profession, or serve only to gratify a vain curiosity. Do not let yourself be made a victim of book agents, and purchase books "at a bargain," books which perhaps have but little value from a literary point of view. At the same time guard against keeping books which are forbidden; for the fact of your having them in your library may be an encouragement to others to read what is dangerous to faith and morals. And may it not be that agents will urge your people to buy such books because you, their pastor, bought the same?

So also be careful not to waste time over newspapers and trashy magazines. One's taste for good and solid reading is easily spoiled by habitual read-

ing of such productions. If you are devoted to your sublime calling, you will find that the study of Sacred Scripture, theology, church history, and the preparation of your instructions, will more than occupy your time; the most industrious priest can scarcely attend to them all.

4. *Pastoral Zeal.*

Are you full of zeal for God's glory and the salvation of immortal souls? Zeal is the soul of the true pastor and confessor. If he is deficient in this virtue he is nothing more than a lifeless body, a corpse, as useless to his people as a statue. He has eyes, but he does not watch over his flock. He has a mouth, but he does not speak; he does not instruct the ignorant, nor correct the erring. He has ears, but he does not hear the cries of the poor and unfortunate. He has hands, but he does not use them to put a stop to disorder and to establish piety. He has feet, but he does not go after the stray sheep, or hasten to assist the dying. "They have mouths, and speak not; they have ears, and hear not." (Ps. 113, 5.)

But supposing you are zealous, has your zeal the qualities necessary to make it useful? Is it animated by charity, regulated by prudence, and sustained by patience? "Let charity inflame your zeal, science enlighten it, and constancy strengthen it," is the advice of St. Bernard. If it has its source in charity, it

will be pure and disinterested, aiming only at promoting the glory of God and the salvation of men. It will be firm and intrepid and as strong as death. It will overcome the greatest obstacles; it will gain or confound the most formidable adversaries; it will sacrifice everything rather than betray the interests of God. "Love is as strong as death; jealousy is as hard as hell." (Cant. 8, 6.) However it must not be impetuous and bitter; for this would indicate passion and whim. It ought to be as full of compassion for the miseries of men as of fearlessness in defending the interests of God. Charity knows how to correct abuses with firmness and to gain the heart of sinners by gentleness; whilst bitterness alienates the hearts of our parishioners and aggravates the evil we intended to remedy.

Charity alone, however, can not render your zeal perfect; prudence must always direct it. Indiscreet zeal causes mischief. Without prudence, firmness degenerates into excessive severity; mildness becomes pernicious indulgence. Prudence is the guide of the heart and directs its desires; it is the guardian of the tongue and seasons all our words with the salt of wisdom. It presides over our projects and suggests the most proper means to put them into execution. The first part of prudence, on the part of the zealous priest, is to attend to the spiritual necessities of his flock without neglecting his own salvation. His first func-

tion is to endeavor to become a saint; he ought to be himself the first object of his zeal.

But besides directing his attention to his own person, prudence must accompany the pastor in the discharge of all his obligations that his people may derive benefit from his ministry. To that end he will study their dispositions and the circumstances in which they are placed. There are restless spirits that must be rebuked; timid souls that must be encouraged; weak minds that need to be strengthened. Aged persons must be exhorted as parents; equals are to be treated as brothers and sisters. Corrections and reprimands must be addressed both in public and in private, but always with discretion and in a manner calculated to show the guilty that it is a father who corrects, and not an enemy who takes revenge. Hastiness must be avoided, and the proper occasion seized in order to insure success. Often it will be necessary that you sacrifice your personal interests in order to gain over a man who will be more favorably impressed by an act of kindness than by the most solid reasoning. Be all things to all men, and never separate the simplicity of the dove from the prudence of the serpent.

Lastly, your zeal must be accompanied with constancy. It must not be like a fire kindled with brushwood which flares up for a little while and then quickly dies away. It must be a steady fire, not to be

extinguished by the waters of tribulation, nor slackened by the ingratitude and indocility of men. Be not disheartened at the first difficulty. God grants to perseverance what He refuses to fervor. Despair not of the salvation of any one; you do not know if the conversion of these obstinate sinners is not reserved to the perseverance of your efforts. When you have wisely formed a good design, pursue its execution with firmness, though without obstinacy. Be not one of those men who begin many things, but finish nothing. Remember that a congregation is like a field which must be cultivated every year; if you neglect to till it, no harvest can be expected.

5. *Retirement and Prayer.*

Are you a truly spiritual man, filled with the spirit of prayer and fond of retirement and union with God? Are you faithful to the exercise of meditation? In the habit of mental prayer you will find the light, the strength, the zeal, the unction which are so necessary to priests who have the care of souls. But if you do not apply yourself to this exercise, or if you omit it often, you will be wanting in almost all the requisite qualifications of a good pastor. All the saints were men of prayer. "Give me a man of prayer," St. Vincent de Paul was often heard to say, "and he will be able to say with the Apostle: I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." If a

priest is faithful to his vocation; if he yields not to temptations; if he succeeds in his office; he owes it to meditation and prayer.

Alain de Solminiac, bishop of Cahors, used to say that a priest can not be saved without meditation; and he ordained no one without having first obliged him to promise that he would apply himself daily to this exercise. The sentiment of this prelate is of great weight when we reflect how much honor he shed on the episcopate by his learning, sanctity and zeal. A priest who neglects meditation will not be able to move his hearers, because he himself is not moved; his words will be dry and destitute of unction. On the other hand, a man of prayer who is thoroughly penetrated with the truths of religion, speaks as he feels. He communicates his convictions to the mind and his feelings to the hearts of those who listen to him; he interests them, touches them, moves them, converts them. In the pulpit, in the confessional, by the bedside of the sick, everywhere he shows himself to be an interior man, a man of God, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.

But to be a man of prayer you must be a man of retirement. You must lead, as much as possible, a recollected life, both interiorly and exteriorly, so that your passions and senses may be kept in due subjection. If you are frequently in company, if you love travelling and feasting, if you live in continual dis-

sipation of mind, you can be neither a man of prayer nor a good pastor. "As often as I was among men, I returned less a man."

But to do this you must shun such forms of diversion as are at variance with your sacerdotal character and make it impossible for you to cultivate the spirit of retirement and prayer. Among these are: the frequent playing of cards, especially if you play for money; the habitual presence at public games, witnessing the races, visiting theatres and movies, mingling with the crowds at public resorts, etc. There are certain places of amusement where truly virtuous and Christ-like priests will never let themselves be seen.* It is true that often owners and managers like to see priests frequent these places; for their presence tends to give prestige and an air of respectability, and thus promotes greater attendance and larger profits. Hence their readiness to give complimentary season tickets and passes to the members of the clergy. But has not God reason to complain of such priests that they are lending their influence to the promotion of the spirit of worldliness which in turn makes for the prevalence of total forgetfulness of God? "The priests have clapped their hands, and my people loved such things." (Jer. 5, 31.)

* "A priest ought to be in no place where his Master would not go; nor employed in anything his Master would not do."
Cardinal Manning—Eternal Priesthood. p. 32.

If you are fond of these things, it is plain that you have lost, or are losing, the spirit of your state. There is no getting away from the truth that you can not love God and the world. You can not serve two masters. And unless you mortify yourself by avoiding the various forms of worldliness you can not be a man of retirement and prayer. And if you object and say that there is no great wrong in enjoying these things, I will reply by asking you: Are you as regular in making your daily meditation, spiritual reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and in saying the Rosary as you are in going to these places? What would be the conduct of the saints were they in your position? What would a St. Vincent de Paul, a St. Francis de Sales, a St. Francis Xavier, a St. John Vianney do under similar conditions?

Answer these questions honestly to yourself, much the same as you no doubt will wish to answer them when they will be put to you after your death, and then resolve to act accordingly. Never lose sight of the truth that you will never be able to accomplish anything for the glory of God and the good of souls if you are not a man of retirement and prayer.

6. *Temperance.*

Have you an inclination to the sin of intemperance? From a priest who indulges a love of drink nothing can be expected except scandals, sacrileges,

bad example and the neglect of duty. Only the day of judgment will fully reveal what great havoc has been wrought in the Church by this sin and how many souls have been scandalized and alienated from the Church by bad example of priests addicted to the vice of intemperance.

It is impossible for a slave to this vice to be a pure and chaste man. St. Jerome does not hesitate to say that a man who is addicted to intoxicating drink is at the same time addicted to impurity. "Let us learn," says he, "what kind of men priests ought not to be. Drunkenness is characteristic of the buffoon and the glutton. A belly filled with wine will quickly foam over into lust. In wine there is luxury; in luxury, sensual pleasure; in sensual pleasure, impurity. He who is impure is dead while he is living; hence he who is drunk, is both dead and buried. Wherever there is gluttony and drunkenness, there lust will predominate. I can not believe that a drunkard can be a pure man."

7. *Disinterestedness.*

Is disinterestedness one of the virtues you are striving to practice? Have you meditated on these words of St. Paul: "Having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content."—"I seek not the things that are yours, but you"—and are you resolved to be guided by the spirit that dictated them? Will

you have the tender feelings of a father for the poor, as the Council of Trent, or rather as God Himself enjoins: "It is commanded by a divine precept that all to whom the care of souls is entrusted, should have a paternal solicitude for the poor and other persons in need." (Sess. 23, C. 1.) Perhaps your intention is to bestow your revenue on your relatives and to bring them out of an inferior condition. Combat this inclination and pray to God to deliver you from this temptation; it would suffice by itself to lead you to destruction. Are you not aware that "there is no luck in a priest's money," as experience has shown time and again?

But apart from all other considerations is not a love for the *Beatitude of Poverty* the great ideal that every true priest will pursue? If our Lord proposes this beatitude to all His followers and desires them to practice it, how much more does He inculcate it on those who have chosen Him as "Pars hereditatis meae et calicis mei?" He would have them learn to be content with what is necessary for life, and retrench all superfluities which so easily lead to sensuality and become an obstacle to true zeal. Hence He has taught us to pray: "Give us *this day* our daily bread."

Then again, the priest must not overlook the truth that only in proportion to his progress in self-denial and self-abnegation will his ministry be blessed by

God. But there is nothing that furnishes more splendid material for the continual practice of this virtue than the voluntary renunciation of those comforts, conveniences and luxuries which are commonly found in the possession of wealth, of a finely furnished residence, elegant furniture, and other means that minister to "creature comforts." "This kind of devil is not cast out but by prayer and fasting."

8. *Chastity.*

I do not ask whether you have a horror of the vice of impurity; I suppose that having been honored with the dignity of the priesthood you have renounced the pleasures of this sin. But have you also a horror for the least wilful fault against the amiable virtue of chastity? Are you reserved in your looks, in your words, in your manners? Do you abstain from frivolous conversations with persons of the other sex? Have you made a "compact with your eyes not so much as to think of a virgin?" Remember the words of the Holy Ghost: "From garments cometh the moth, and from woman the iniquity of a man." (Ecclus. 42, 12.) Does it not seem to be a rather frequent occurrence that when all other temptations fail to bring about a priest's ruin, the devil employs the services of a woman and thus succeeds in scoring a victory? That you may triumph over the many temptations prepared for you by the enemy, you must

never relax in the practice of humility, mortification and devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God. If you think slightingly of these virtues and therefore neglect them, you will not be able to remain faithful to your vow of chastity.

Sometimes we meet with priests who have grown tired of the yoke imposed by the vow of celibacy. They call it a tyranny and try to advance all kinds of excuses for yielding to the temptations of the flesh and indulging in forbidden pleasures, to the ruin often, and cruel anguish of soul, of those very persons whose eternal salvation is entrusted to their care. Some even have the hardihood to plead in excuse that they did not know what they were doing when they took the vow of chastity before Subdeaconship; that they did not know what was implied by it, and what obligations it imposed on them.

What folly to allege such an excuse! Were they forced into the priesthood? Were they not told expressly on the morning of their ordination when they stood before the altar that they should carefully consider the step they were about to take; that they were still free to return to the world and to secular occupations; that no coercion whatever was used on them; and that they should retire if they felt that the burden of the office was too heavy for their shoulders? Did they not have plenty of time during their years in the Seminary to deliberate and test their strength and

fully inform themselves as to what the vow of celibacy really implied? No; they have no valid excuse that they can make if now they yield to the seductive charms of impure pleasure, sin against their vow, and are a source of scandal and perdition to Christ's little ones.

No one can deny that the sacrifice imposed on human nature by this vow is very great; but will not the true priest make it gladly and cheerfully, both to imitate His divine Master as perfectly as possible, and also to return, by means of its faithful observance, some little measure of gratitude for the surpassing grace of his sublime vocation? It is hardly possible to think of a means that is better calculated to help him discharge his debt of gratitude for this altogether exceptional grace, than the cheerful renunciation of those very pleasures that make so strong an appeal for indulgence to the earthly man.

9. *Steadiness of Character.*

Lastly, examine what are your natural dispositions. Are you even-tempered, polite, considerate, obliging, gentlemanly, active without being rude or petulent? If you have acquired no mastery and control over yourself; if you give way to excessive joy at one time, and to sullenness and melancholy at another; if you are eccentric in your manner of thinking and acting; unsteady in your designs; rash in your undertak-

ings; liable to be guided by prejudice; obstinate in your opinions; etc.; and therefore unable to direct yourself—how will you be able to direct others?

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Now if your conscience can return a favorable answer to all these questions, you can with safe conscience accept the charge of souls as entrusted to you by your superiors. Your ministry can not fail to procure the glory of God and the sanctity of the faithful. But if, on the contrary, you must confess that you are sadly deficient in several things, then it were better for you to wait until you have acquired the necessary virtues. And if you can not do this, then it behooves you to leave nothing undone to apply yourself with redoubled diligence to the acquisition of the qualities needed for the successful discharge of your onerous duties. God is ready to aid you in the work of sanctifying yourself, and with His grace and your earnest labor you can make up in a short time what unhappily you neglected to do in the past.

FOURTH CONSIDERATION

THE GRACES ATTACHED TO THE SACRED PRIESTHOOD

THE office of a pastor of souls would only serve to terrify and discourage us if it presented nothing but dangers and difficulties. But thanks be to God, great confidence and courage inspire us when we reflect on the graces which God has provided for us for the proper fulfillment of our onerous duties.

God, ever wise and merciful, measures His graces to the work He gives us to perform, to the weight of the burden He lays upon our shoulders, and to the imminence of the dangers to which our ministry exposes us. Now as the work that we have to accomplish is very difficult, as the burden He lays on us is very heavy, and as the dangers He causes us to encounter for His glory are fearful and numerous, we have every reason to hope and expect that His goodness and bounty will supply us with abundant succors and with special and choice graces for the fulfillment of all our obligations.

We are the chiefs, the guides, the fathers, the pastors of our flocks. All these offices entitle us to certain gifts without which we could not discharge

our duties. Deprived of these gifts, we would be chiefs unqualified for our station; we would be blind guides, fathers without fecundity, pastors without vigilance, neglecting to feed the flock of Christ.

We are destined to be the models of the faithful, and mediators between God and the people; God then gives us grace to practice all the virtues by which we must edify; He gives us the means of acting worthily the part of intercessors; otherwise we would be dumb and useless mediators. Nothing is wanting on the part of God; but, alas! if there is anything lacking in us, the fault is ours; it comes from our tepidity and want of fidelity to grace. God is never wanting to those who are faithful to Him.

Christ made the solemn promise to His ministers that He would be with them to the end of the world. He is with us by His Spirit and His grace; both of these enlighten, direct, fortify, console and sanctify us. It is His Spirit who speaks to the people through a faithful minister. He suggests to him on many occasions the truths he has to announce. How often does it not happen to a holy priest that he suggests to his penitents or to his hearers means of improvement, remedies to bad habits, moving reflections, which patient study and long meditation would not have furnished. "It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father." (Matt. 10, 20.) Happy he who is attentive to the voice of heaven, and seeks the divine

glory alone in his pastoral functions! He will receive from on high the assistance he needs in all difficulties and emergencies.

The example of St. Paul is calculated to encourage us in the labors of the apostleship and make us rely on the powerful aid of Him who sends us to labor for the good of souls. The Apostle of the Gentiles tells us that he labored more than all the other apostles, but at the same time he does not take the glory to himself but attributes his success to the grace of God. "I have labored more abundantly than all they; yet not I, but the grace of God with me." (1. Cor. 15, 10.) In another place he writes that his sufferings in Asia had been so excessive and so much above his natural strength that he was weary of life; but he is careful to add that this happened in order that he might not trust in himself, but in God, who did not fail to deliver him.

In all the letters of this same apostle we see his zeal and gratitude increase at the sight of the graces, the succors and the consolations which he hoped for and received in the discharge of his laborious ministry. He wrote to his converts at Philippi: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." (Philip. 4, 13.) In this first epistle to Timothy he returns thanks to our Lord for having enabled him to fulfill his apostolic functions: "I give Him thanks who hath strengthened me, even to Christ Jesus, our Lord, for

that He hath counted me faithful, putting me in the ministry." (1. Tim. 1, 12.) And in his second epistle to the same disciple he relates for his encouragement and consolation what signal favors he had received from heaven in the midst of the persecutions he had to suffer in preaching the Gospel. "The Lord stood by me," he writes, "and strengthened me and I was delivered from the mouth of the lion. The Lord hath delivered me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom; to whom be glory forever and ever." (2 Tim. 4, 17). Elsewhere expressions seem to fail him when he speaks of the consolations he experienced in the most painful circumstances, and we can not read his words without emotion and without sharing his joy and gratitude. "I am filled with comfort; I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation; for also when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we suffered all tribulation; combats without, fears within. But God who comforteth the humble, comforted us by the coming of Titus." (2. Cor. 7, 4.)

Blessed be the God of all consolation, who dries the tears, who prospers the labors of zealous priests! "Blessed be God—the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, so that we also may be able to comfort them who are in distress." (2. Cor. 1, 3.)

But what we can not sufficiently admire and return

thanks for is that our duties which are so arduous and dangerous are at the same time sources of the most abundant graces. The truths of salvation of which we are the depositaries, interpreters and preachers, spread a vivid light in our minds and move our hearts most forcibly. The holy writings which we daily peruse in the Holy Mass and in the Office, store our memory with pious thoughts. The constant practice of meditation lights up in our souls the sacred fire of divine love and urges us to tend to perfection. "In my meditation a fire shall flame out." (Ps. 38, 4.) The assiduous reading of spiritual books gives us a thorough knowledge of our obligations. A good book will often address to us a reproof which even our confessor would fear to administer or would administer too timidly.

The various public and private instructions which we have to give are also a means of improvement that are designed to promote our spiritual advancement. In preparing and delivering them we have merely to say to ourselves what we recommend to others.

How many favors do we receive in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries! There our souls are fed with the sacred flesh of Christ, the principle of the spiritual life; "He that eateth me, the same also shall live by me." (John 6, 58). There we drink that mysterious wine which begets virgins, a single drop of which is enough to sanctify ten thousand worlds; there

we receive not only grace, but the Author of every grace, who gives Himself to us as a pledge of eternal life. And if to this we add the daily visits to the Blessed Sacrament, where we can converse with our Lord on terms of the most intimate friendship and treat with Him of the affairs of our ministry, we must confess that God has left nothing undone to enable us to procure in abundance all the helps we need for the faithful discharge of our priestly duties.

Even the confessional, so much to be dreaded on many accounts, furnishes helps to our salvation. Do we hear sins which we have never committed? This should make us feel thankful for having been preserved from them by the grace of God. Do we hear sins of which we ourselves have at any time been guilty? While proposing motives for contrition to our penitent, we should enter into the same sentiments of repentance and renew our resolution of never more offending the divine Majesty. Sometimes we are the directors of innocent souls, who by their humility, docility and purity make us blush at our own imperfections, and stimulate us to new efforts in order to become holy like them. At other times we witness conversions so sudden and so extraordinary that they are evident proofs of the presence of God in His Church. By such means the evangelical laborer is encouraged, aided and edified.

We shall also find many succors in our intercourse

with holy priests. Their conversation, their sentiments and example will instruct and touch us. In an interview with a sainted priest, a pious friend, we open our heart, we confide to him our troubles, we clear up our doubts, we become more firm in the practice of piety, we acquire new strength to bear the labors of a penitent and apostolic life. St. Vincent de Paul, the first time he saw St. Francis de Sales, was so much impressed with his meekness, his zeal, and other virtues, that he felt a new ardor in the service of the Church, and experienced a sensible increase in the love of God.

"O my God!" he said, "how very good and amiable Thou must be, since the bishop of Geneva is so good and amiable." The pious and zealous Fr. Boudon undertook several long journeys to enjoy the conversation of persons eminently virtuous. He came back from such visits very much consoled and strongly resolved to labor and suffer courageously. Let us therefore cultivate friendships with such of our confreres as we know to be priests according to the heart of God and whose company and conversation will be a means of acquiring more and more the true spirit of our state. But let us also, as mentioned before, when we spoke of the dangers of the sacred ministry, carefully avoid the company of priests who are lax and worldly and have lost the ecclesiastical spirit.

To all this should be added the consideration that

divine Providence, by calling us to the priesthood, has delivered us from the solicitudes of marriage and from temporal concerns, in order that, having our minds more free, we might apply ourselves with great assiduity to the things that relate to the divine honor and the sanctification of souls. "He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord; how he may please God. But he that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife; and he is divided." (1. Cor. 7, 32.)

Even the presence of the people who look upon us, who notice everything we do, and who forgive us nothing, is a restraint on our inclinations, and furnishes us with a motive for keeping a close watch on ourselves and behave in a manner becoming our high station.

* * * * * * *

How many means of sanctification! Could we perish with so many helps at hand! Ah! if we do perish, our ruin will be brought on by ourselves, by the abuse of so many blessings; and this abuse will be the result of our languid faith. We use holy things through habit, without interior dispositions, as if they were profane things. But let our faith be a living one that is most rich in blessings, most abundant in inestimable advantages which God has annexed to it.

How good, how admirable is our Lord in the care He takes of His ministers! The most dangerous and most difficult state of life is transformed by Him into one that is most rich in blessings, most abundant in succors, into the most privileged, the most advantageous, the most holy.

FIFTH CONSIDERATION

ADVANTAGES OF THE SACRED PRIESTHOOD

HAVING in the preceding considerations studied the excellence of the sacred ministry, its difficulties and its dangers, as also the graces attached to it, it remains for us now to say a few words about the advantages and benefits it has in store for ourselves and for the faithful, both in time and eternity.

1. We do not, of course, count among the advantages of the ministry anything that relates to purely temporal interests. These advantages are earthly, vain and transient and only too often serve as dangerous snares in which many allow themselves to be caught. Consequently humility fears them, disinterestedness despises them, and charity accepts them only to employ them for the glory of God and the service of the neighbor. St. Paul looked upon these advantages as filth: "I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ." (Philip. 3, 8.) If he rejoices that the Philippians entertain sentiments of affection towards him, it is

solely because he hopes that by this means he will be able to be more useful to them with regard to their salvation. "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that may abound to your account." (Philip. 4, 17.)

To labor profitably for the salvation of souls is, then, according to the Apostle, the precious and inestimable advantage of our ministry. To have prevented a single sin is infinitely more than to have delivered a besieged city; to have rescued a soul from the bondage of Satan, is more than to have procured the liberation of a whole people; to have gained a soul to God, is a greater conquest than to have subjugated all the nations of the world; because in reality sin is a greater evil than the devastation of provinces and kingdoms; and because the procuring of the grace of reconciliation to a sinner is a greater good than the gaining of all the treasures of the earth. Yes, an immortal soul is worth more than all the most precious objects in the world. Give me a heart which truly loves God, a heart burning with zeal, and it will understand what I say. "Da mihi animas, cetera tolle!" becomes the motto of the apostolic priest. To amass perishable riches, men cross the seas, they repair to the remotest regions, they encounter every kind of perils; should not a priest be as zealous for the honor of the Almighty and the salvation of the immortal souls? "It is a shame," said

St. Francis Xavier, "to see that the ministers of the Gospel have been preceded by merchants in the newly discovered islands. The gold and pearls of the Indies and Japan have a greater attraction for these men, than the souls created to the image of God and redeemed by the Blood of Christ have for us priests."

When St. Ignatius was trying to establish in Rome houses of refuge for penitent women he was told that all his trouble was to little purpose, because these women would fall again after leaving the asylum. The Saint answered: "Were I to succeed in hindering but a single mortal sin I should be well recompensed for my trouble."

When after much toil and after suffering many repulses and contradictions a holy priest of our own time, assisted by pious colleagues, had succeeded in putting a stop to certain disorders in a number of parishes, he was wont to say in transports of joy: "Ah, we are too much rewarded." He meant that he knew of no greater reward, of no sweeter satisfaction on earth for a priest than to have arrested the progress of vice and established the practice of virtue. And indeed, how consoling is it for a pastor to see abuses corrected, scandals prevented or repaired; to see festivals kept holy, the sacraments frequented, families well ordered, children piously brought up! "I have no greater grace than this, to hear that my children walk in truth." (3 John 1, 4.)

A good pastor, by his attentions and devotedness, gains the confidence of his people. What happiness for him to witness the attachment shown to his person! He avails himself of this attachment to promote the glory of God and the improvement of those committed to his charge; he thus becomes their mediator with God and the link which binds them to their Creator.

A striking and affecting example of this tender union of the people with their pastor is found in St. Paul. He had preached to the inhabitants of Ephesus with great success, but also with great fatigue and suffering. On the point of setting out for Jerusalem he sent from Melitus for the ancients, the priests and other evangelical laborers, who came, followed by a large number of the Apostle's converts. After having exhorted them to perseverance and given them excellent counsels, he bade them farewell, telling them that he would see them no more. How great was their grief at hearing this announcement! "And there was much weeping among them all; and falling on the neck of Paul, they kissed him, being grieved most of all for the word which he had said, that they should see his face no more." (Acts 20, 37.) How touching a spectacle! What a union! What affection between the pastor and his flock! The friendship formed between the friends of God by charity and zeal is far sweeter and stronger than that which

is formed between worldlings by interest and natural inclination.

The faithful who are attached to their pastor often pray for him, and these prayers avail much. They obtain for him many graces which enable him to persevere and acquire perfection. Thus zeal for the salvation of others becomes a pledge of our own salvation; and if we remark that many of our clerical brethren remain faithful to all their duties in the midst of their perils and scandals; if we notice that there are more saints among priests who exercise the holy ministry than among those who live in a private life, we may believe that it is partly owing to the prayers offered for them by their flock. We should therefore, after the example of St. Paul, frequently ask for the prayers of our people: "Brethren, pray for us.—Be instant in prayer—praying withal for us also."

But it is not only by praying for us that our brethren of the laiety are useful to us; all the other good works which we induce them to practice, are in some respects ours. Our reward will be proportionate to the amount of good they will have done by reason of our ministry. Supposing even that they profit not by our care, our recompense will not be the less for it; in that case it will be measured by our zeal and effort. In this manner it may happen that he who will have had less success, will have more

merit; because he labored with less satisfaction in this life; his virtue was more pure.

Who is able to conceive what will be the consolation and glory of the good pastor on the Day of Judgment? "When the Prince of pastors shall appear, you shall receive a never fading crown of glory." (1. Pet. 5, 4.) Can we do too much to deserve this crown which will never wither? If the hope of worldly honors impels ambitious men to undertake the most difficult things, what ardor should we not experience at the sight of that brilliant crown which will distinguish the anointed of the Lord from the other elect? They who have taught others the way to heaven shall shine in eternity as the stars of the firmament: "They that instruct many unto justice shall shine as stars for all eternity." (Dan. 12, 3.) The souls whom the zealous pastor will have guided in the way of salvation, will be his hope, his happiness, and his crown before the tribunal of Christ, to whom he will present them: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glory? Are not you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy."

St. Gregory the Great represents the general judgment as infinitely glorious for holy pastors, who will present to the sovereign Judge all the souls whom they have drawn from sin, or preserved in the state of grace. "There Peter will appear with the people of

Judea whom he converted; there Paul will appear, presenting, as it were, the whole world which he converted. Andrew will present the people of Achaia, John those of Asia, Thomas those of India. There all the shepherds of the Lord's flocks will appear with the souls whom they won for God with their holy preaching."

2. The ministry, advantageous as it is to the faithful priest, confers still more valuable and numerous blessings on the people. It causes ignorance to disappear, puts an end to disorder and crime, spreads on all sides the knowledge of salvation; makes religion and every virtue flourish. Through it sinners are converted, heretics are brought back to the Church, pious souls are directed in the path of perfection, and they who manifest a vocation, are prepared for consecrating themselves to God in the sanctuary, or in the cloister or convent.

Through it children, the hope of the Church and of society, are trained up in the way they should walk, and like tender plants, are cultivated with great care; they are fed with the milk of Christian doctrine, and instructed how to approach the Sacraments worthily. Young persons are put on their guard against the dangers and temptations peculiar to their age, and against the snares which are laid for their innocence. Married persons are taught the obligations of their state of life and the manner of bringing up their offspring

in the fear and love of their Creator. Persons of advanced age are put in mind of the last journey they are soon to make and exhorted to think only of eternity.

The poor, the sick and the distressed are visited and relieved, and encouraged to suffer their misfortunes with patience and resignation. The rich and those who have authority are admonished to use their wealth and power for the welfare of their fellowmen. Add to this, occasions of sin removed, dangerous amusements banished, charitable societies instituted, schools erected and maintained, asylums opened, churches built, new congregations formed—and you will have a brief summary of the chief benefits of which the sacred ministry is the source. Let these considerations inspire us with the desire of commencing our career with confidence and pursuing it with ardor. He who soweth much shall reap much: "He that soweth in blessings, shall also reap in blessings." (2. Cor. 9, 6.)

The fruits of our labors are not liable to be destroyed by death or by the injustice of men; they are permanent, they are eternal: "Unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that can not fade, reserved in heaven for you, who, by the power of God are kept by faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." (1. Pet. 1, 4.)

We shall soon obtain our reward; we shall soon re-

ceive our crown. "God, after you have suffered a little will Himself perfect you, and confirm you, and establish you." (1. Pet. 5, 10.) It is the just Judge who will place it on our head, as the recompense for the combats and sufferings we have endured for His sake. "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me in that day." (2. Tim. 4, 7.) It is His will that His ministers should share His throne and glory: "Father, I will that where I am, they also whom Thou hast given me, may be with me, that they may see my glory which Thou hast given me." (John 17, 24.) "You shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matt. 19, 28.)

Let us then exert all our faculties, use all our energies, spend our means and ourselves for the immortal souls whose salvation depends on the manner in which we shall discharge the functions of the sacred priesthood. "I most gladly will spend, and be spent myself for your souls." (2. Cor. 12, 15.)

APPENDIX

RESOLUTIONS OF A NEWLY ORDAINED PRIEST

THE following are the resolutions which I made on the day of my ordination to the priesthood, and which I firmly propose to observe faithfully with the help of God to the end of my life:

1. Every day I will apply myself to Mental Prayer for the space of half an hour, and to Spiritual Reading for at least fifteen minutes. If prevented from making Meditation in the morning, I will try to make up for it during the day.

2. I will always strive to recite the canonical hours "*digne, attente ac devote.*" Before beginning I will recite the "Aperi Domine" with great attention. I will make a special effort to say the "Gloria Patri" at the end of the Psalms with greatest possible devotion. I will make it a practice to recite the various parts of the Office at the earliest opportunity, and regularly anticipate Matins and Lauds.

3. Fully convinced that of all the actions of the day none is more pleasing to God and of greater benefit to myself and to others than the Holy Mass worthily celebrated, I will strive every day to offer up this

Holy Sacrifice with the utmost fervor and devotion. For this purpose I will always make a careful preparation before, and a fervent thanksgiving after it.

4. As far as possible I will receive the Sacrament of Penance every eight days and at a fixed time. Except in cases of necessity I will never postpone my confession beyond two weeks.

5. The last Saturday of every month (or some other convenient day) I will devote to retirement and recollection. On this day I will meditate on the four last things, examine myself on the observance of these resolutions and prepare myself for the hour of death.

6. Every year I will faithfully devote a few days to the exercises of the spiritual retreat. These days I will spend in recollection, meditation, examination of conscience and preparation for death. If there is no annual diocesan retreat, I will make a retreat privately.

7. Since order leads to God, I will strive to live according to a fixed rule of life. In my order of the day I will assign fixed hours to rising in the morning, to pastoral work, to theological and scriptural studies, to the preparation of sermons and catechetical instructions, to devotions and recreation.

8. Mindful of the words of Job: "I made a covenant with my eyes that I would not so much as think upon a virgin," I will most carefully avoid those

things which lead to familiarity with women, and will keep a constant watch over my heart lest it gradually come to foster dangerous affections for them. The direction of their conscience I will undertake only in the confessional.

9. I will at all times abstain from such forms of recreation as are unsuited to the priestly state. I will avoid those gatherings of priests where unpriestly recreation and improper conversations are indulged in. I will at all times refrain most scrupulously from unkind and uncharitable remarks about my confreres and especially about my superiors. "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." "Forgive and you shall be forgiven."

10. That I may always carry about in my body the mortification of Jesus Christ, I will carefully avoid all appearance of worldliness, abstain from frivolous amusements, practice moderation in eating and drinking, and guard against the waste of time by useless visits and conversations. "This kind of devil is not cast out but by prayer and fasting."

11. I will foster a most ardent and personal love for our Lord Jesus Christ whose unworthy minister I am. For this purpose I will cultivate a special devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to the Sacred Passion and the Most Holy Name of Jesus. I will faithfully make daily visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

12. I will cultivate a most tender and childlike devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. I will daily recite at least the third part of the Rosary in her honor. On Saturdays and the eves of her feasts I will perform some special act of devotion, such as reciting a part of my Office on my knees, or performing some act of self-denial. All my priestly actions I will place under her protection. "Son, behold thy mother!"

"He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved. (Matt. 24, 13.)

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PIOT, B.S. 45825
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